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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE CARAGANA PROJECT:
EMPOWERMENT IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

BY

© **Lora Lea Gaboriau**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF SCIENCE**

IN

FAMILY STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Edmonton, Alberta

FALL, 1993

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Lora Lea Gaboriau

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September 29, 1993

EMPOWERMENT IN A RURAL COMMUNITY: THE CARAGANA PROJECT[1]

---

[1] An Identity for the Project. Fred Bradley, one of the community members, named the project. The title has significant meaning, and establishes ownership of the project by the community. Fred writes:

> When I drive around our community, I see many old farm yards and building sites, the homes of the early settlers. The buildings may be falling down or gone. Trees and brush may be encroaching on the yard. But often as not, standing along the edge of the driveway, or spreading across an old pasture, will be a caragana hedge.
>
> To the men and women who planted them, they were the embodiment of a dream. Homesteading the bush land of our community was not a life for the faint-hearted. But men and women came here with hopes and dreams for the future, and set about making those dreams come true. They worked hard, cleared the bush, built homes, raised families, and created a community out of their vision. And as an act of commitment to their vision, they planted caragana hedges.
>
> Time went by. The settlers passed on. Social and economic conditions changed. Communities fragmented and withered away. The settlers' children and grandchildren have their own hopes and dreams. But the caragana hedges endure as a testimony to the ability of people to make something out of their dreams.
>
> The ***Caragana Project*** is an opportunity for us to pool our hopes and dreams, to define the goals and plans we need to commit ourselves to as a community. We need to look at our assets, consider our potential, decide what we want the future of our community to be like. We need to plant our own "Caragana hedges".

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **THE CARAGANA PROJECT: EMPOWERMENT IN A RURAL COMMUNITY** submitted by **LORA LEA GABORIAU** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF SCIENCE**.

N. Keating
Dr. Norah Keating

Maryanne Poirier
Dr. Maryanne Poirier

Eloise Murray
Dr. Eloise Murray

September 03, 1993

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my children, Lindsay and Tim, for their love and understanding and to my dear friend Florence for her constant support and encouragement. Their belief in me encouraged me in the writing and completion of this thesis.

ABSTRACT

The issues facing rural communities have never been more challenging. In the Caragana Project, a project team assisted a small rural community to identify their issues in the initial phase of the project. These issues were summarized by members of the project team and presented to the community. The data collection phase of the project took place in an eight day time period. Individuals from the community collaborated on the project as members of the project team. Additional members of the community participated in the identification of issues.

The problem addressed in this study can be stated in one question: does assisting community members in identification of issues enable them to become empowered so they continue the process of resolving their issues?

After analyzing the data, the answer to the question, one year after the data collection, is yes. The Caragana Project provided a catalyst for the community to mobilize and continue the process to resolve the issues that had been identified with the project team.

Empowerment as a process was reviewed in the literature, and a definition of empowerment was developed for the Caragana Project. Empowerment was viewed as going beyond individuals, taking into account the interactions with others and the context in which the individual lives. The human ecological framework provided the conceptual framework with empowerment as the underlying process. The links between empowerment and the human ecological framework were analyzed and discussed.

The method used for the project was based on social action research and rapid rural appraisal. The emphasis on individuals working together collaboratively to resolve issues of mutual concern suggested a link between social action research and empowerment as a process.

The assumptions underlying the project were seen as key to the empowerment process. They are analyzed to highlight the way they were operationalized in the empowerment process of the Caragana Project. A case is made for future research to view empowerment as an underlying process to the human ecological framework. Furthermore, explicit links between empowerment as a process and social action research methods are seen as important in making connections between theory and research.

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I want to express my thanks to the community and to members of the project team. Their generosity and enthusiasm made the project enjoyable and exciting. Their cooperation made the project possible.

To the Australian team members, my thanks for an opportunity to learn a new process and participate in research in action.

I would like to express my appreciation to the representatives from Alberta Agriculture whose coordination of the project provided the organization necessary for the project to be successful. My thanks are also extended to the Alberta Agriculture Initiatives Fund for the funding of the Caragana Project.

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I. Introduction

The issues faced by rural communities in the 1990's have never been more challenging. Recession has affected not only the economic base of communities but also has threatened the political, social and educational systems that keep them alive. This struggle for survival is faced by rural communities on a global scale (Craig, Mayo & Taylor, 1990). Some are in serious stress and decline, and some will disappear. Others will manage to adapt and survive, perhaps through transformation and redefinition (Fitchen, 1991). Although the struggle for survival is ongoing, many community members remain committed to their community, usually for the very reasons that drew them there in the first place. These reasons include such things as family heritage (the family farm), love of the land, wanting to raise a family away from the dangers inherent in city life, the pace of life in a smaller community, an investment in future generations, and commitment to the environment. Membership in a rural community suggests that community members have a vested interest in the community, so that keeping it alive and flourishing is critical to maintaining their vested interest. Fitchen (1991) suggests that communities will endure because people are working hard to preserve what they value in rural life.

Although few would argue with the difficulties small rural communities currently face, communities have responded in a variety of ways to the problems that confront them (Craig et al, 1990). The path to ensuring the future of rural communities is often unclear. Although many communities would acknowledge their own responsibility for ensuring their future, many factors are outside their control. For example, such things as changes in agricultural commodities are controlled by international economic trends outside of the community. However, the potential loss of schools due to low population, high unemployment due to lack of industry, migration of young people to cities, and loss of environmental treasures may be within the control of local communities. The potential to resolve these issues goes beyond the scope of individuals, and must take into account interactions with others and the world in which they live.

How then, can community members mobilize to develop the capacity within themselves to resolve the issues that they face? The Caragana Project assisted local people with identification and analysis of the issues in their community as a basis for future community planning. The data collection phase of the project took place over an eight day time period in a small rural community in northern Alberta. The focus of this thesis is on the theoretical and methodological approach to this process. Its major objective is to examine the links between the theoretical framework and the method to assist others in similar studies.

The purpose of the Caragana Project was to provide an example for others to enable communities to become empowered. One of the assumptions inherent within this project is that there is value in helping rural communities survive. The problem addressed in the Caragana Project focused on one major question related to the process: does assisting community members in identification of issues enable them to become empowered so they continue the process of resolving their issues?

The Caragana Project used a human ecological framework with empowerment as an underlying process. The method for the project was based on social action research methods and rapid rural appraisal. Empowerment as a process for the Caragana Project focused on actualizing competencies possessed by individuals and groups and enabling them to use these competencies more effectively. The empowerment process, as used in this project, focuses primarily on the local community as the centre for the process, with potential being mobilized by interactions at the community level. There is little evidence to suggest that communities spontaneously organize to resolve issues (Craig et al, 1990). The Caragana Project provided a catalyst, so that once the issues had been identified, the community could then mobilize to resolve their issues.

II. Conceptual Framework

This chapter will discuss the human ecological framework as the conceptual framework for the Caragana Project. A review of definitions of empowerment as a process highlights the implicit, as well as explicit, links between empowerment as a process and the human ecological framework. The definitions, assumptions, and a model of empowerment within an ecological framework are also discussed in relation to the Caragana Project. The objective of this study concludes this chapter.

Human Ecological Framework

The human ecological framework is focused on the context in which the individual lives, the interactions an individual has with others, and interactions with the environment in which the individual lives. The individual cannot be viewed in isolation. The interactions between the individual and others, and the individual and the environment provide opportunities for mutual influence and mutual accommodation.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) illustrates the contextual view of human ecology. First, he views the developing person as a growing, dynamic entity that progressively moves into and restructures the environment in which the person resides rather than merely being an object of environmental impact. Second, he sees the interaction between the individual and the environment as characterized by reciprocity in a process of mutual accommodation. Third, he views the environment as not limited to a single, immediate setting, but extending to incorporate interconnections among such settings, as well as to external influences emanating from the larger environment.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the human ecological framework as a set of four nested structures. The innermost level, the microsystem, contains the immediate surroundings of the developing person, other persons present in this setting, the nature of the links between them, and the complex of interrelations in this setting. The next level, the mesosystem, includes the interrelations and interconnectedness between the settings and the developing person. In this next level events occur that affect what happens in one's immediate surroundings. This level is the exosystem which an individual may never enter directly. This level could include government institutions making decisions that affect the individual, although she may never be directly involved with the institution or decision. Bronfenbrenner views these three interconnected systems within a larger system, the macrosystem, which includes the patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture.

Bubolz and Sontag (1988) also state that the core of human ecology is the human ecosystem and the reciprocal relations of individuals and families with their near environment. They focus on the integration of people with their environment. Although they use terminology different from that used by Bronfenbrenner (1979), their views of human ecology appear to be the same. The interactions between the levels described by Bronfenbrenner are analogous to the reciprocal relations described by Bubolz and Sontag.

The Cornell Empowerment Group (1989) developed a human ecological model from a sociological perspective to fit their definition of empowerment. This model, depicted in Figure 1 examines the relationships among 7 different levels in the empowerment process. The dotted lines illustrate the interconnectedness and interrelationships among levels. The process of mutual accommodation and mutual influence is evident in the movement among levels.

The model developed by the Cornell Group (1989) reflects Bronfenbrenner's (1979) basic premise of interactions between the developing person and the environment including his four structures within human ecology. The three innermost circles used in the Cornell model; relationship with self; partner and parent child relationships; and family dynamics fit into Bronfenbrenner's microsystem. The fourth circle in the Cornell model, the informal network relationships looks at the interrelationships and interconnectedness between settings, and the developing person or the mesosystem according to Bronfenbrenner. The institutional relationships may be the level where events occur that effect what happens in one's own surroundings, but in which a person may not enter, the exosystem. The macrosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner, contains the overarching patterns of ideology and organization of the social institution common to a particular culture or subculture. This is seen in the two outermost circles in the Cornell model, the socio-economic constraints and privileges and cultural ideologies, and the interrelationships with local biological and global natural environments. Interactions including reciprocity and mutual accommodation that Bronfenbrenner emphasized are evident in the model by Cornell. The evolving development of individuals, and the continued restructuring of the environment are seen in the fluidity between boundaries in the Cornell model. The direction of influence is both inside and outside which implies mutual accommodation.

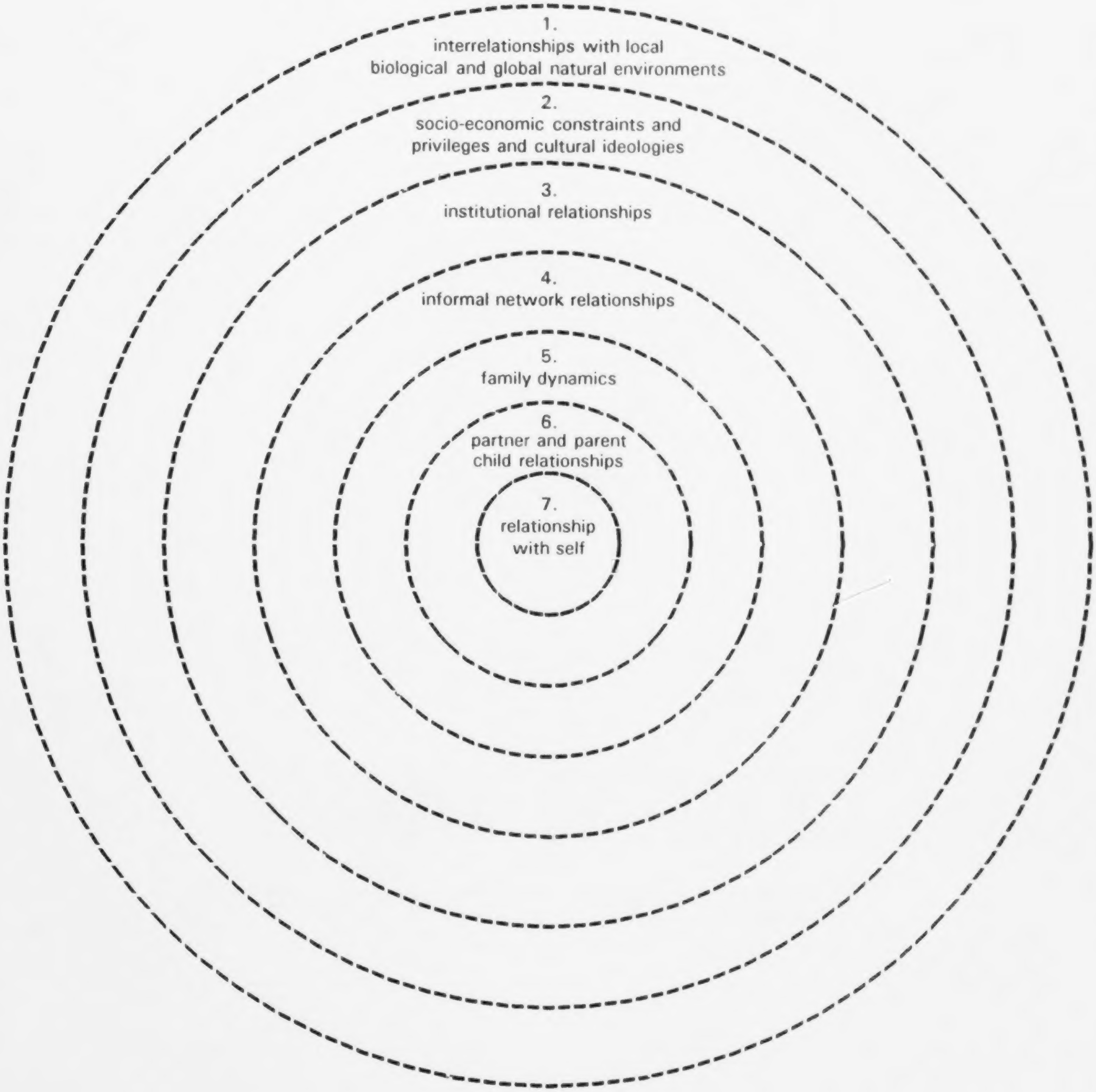
1.
interrelationships with local
biological and global natural environments
2.
socio-economic constraints and
privileges and cultural ideologies
3.
institutional relationships
4.
informal network relationships
5.
family dynamics
6.
partner and parent
child relationships
7.
relationship
with self

Figure 1. The Underlying Model of Empowerment in a Human Ecological Framework.

Note: From " Empowerment and Family Support" by The Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989, unpublished manuscript.

The model proposed by the Cornell Group (1989) also focuses on the human interrelationships with the natural environment. The first circle of this model shows that all belief systems, institutional and personal relationships are presumed to be influenced by people's interdependence with land, water, air and other species at local, biological, and global levels. In the second circle, are systems that influence the distribution of resources, and the conditions that reflect the prevailing values. Institutional relationships (circle 3) involve not only ties among major institutions of the culture, (e.g., schools, churches, workplace, social services and legal systems) but also the relationships among individuals or groups and those institutions. Informal networks, (circle 4) are made up of relatives, neighbours, friends and coworkers that play key roles in providing information, material resources, advice and emotional support. Family dynamics (circle 5) involve the ways that roles are assigned, and work, nurturing and leisure activities are carried out in the family as a unit. In the sixth circle the emphasis is on the knowledge, attitudes and skills involved in productive relationships with the immediate family. The innermost circle focuses on self concept, and with the process of building a positive self image. The boundaries between environmental systems included in the model are permeable, with the direction of influence both from outside of the model inward and from the inside outward.

Assumptions

There are a number of assumptions underlying the human ecological framework. These assumptions focus on the diverse and complex environment in which an individual lives, the resources that exist in an individual's world, the development of these resources over time, and the interactions that take place between the individual and others, and the individual and the environment.

The first assumption is that cultural diversity and pluralism are valid and defining qualities of community life and environmental diversity (Trickett, Kelly and Vicent, 1985). The differences inherent in cultural diversity and pluralism can be viewed as resources or characteristics of the community. These differences also affect the interactions between individuals and others, and individuals and their environment. For example, Trickett (1984) refers to adaptation as the emphasis on the characteristics of the context, the options and constraints they embody in their norms, values, structures, and processes, and the ways in which individuals cope with, adapt to, and change these contexts. The characteristics of the context take into account the cultural diversity, pluralism, and the history of the community. Succession or understanding how history has contributed to the current way the setting is, and how this history provides a perspective for couching decisions about immediate action within a longer range time frame is also part of the context according to Trickett (1984). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view of the macrosystem, the long-term patterns of ideology and organization of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture takes succession into account. This includes the history of a culture, the current norms of a culture, and the changes a culture makes over time in order to survive. This acceptance of the diversity and complexity of the environment in which the individual lives is inferred in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) and Bubolz and Sontag's (1988) discussion of the reciprocity or mutual accommodation between individuals and their environment.

This first assumption is based upon a respect and acceptance of differences within a community. Where competence is recognized, more opportunities for development occur. In an analysis of empowerment strategies, Serrano-Garcia (1984) suggests the same value, but uses different terminology and focuses on the change agents and participants' relationships. She speaks to an equal relationship between the change agents and participants in the process or abandonment of the expert role, and a creation of genuine dialogue between those involved in the process so that all participation is considered legitimate. This implies mutual accommodation and respect for the differences inherent in individuals.

The second assumption of human ecology is that resources are important (Trickett et al, 1985). Trickett et al describe resources as those skills, qualities, structures, or occurrences which can be mobilized in a specific community at a particular time to resolve the community's issues or enhance its development. In recognition that competence exists within individuals, more resources are available to the community, the community can more easily adapt to external change, and can also promote more opportunities for the development of individuals and the community at large. A resource perspective assumes community potential. In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) discussion of the human ecological framework, this resource perspective appears to fit into the microsystem, the immediate surroundings of developing persons and the complexity of interrelations in this setting. However, Bubolz and Sontag's (1988) perspective on resources focuses on the integration of individuals with each other and with their environment which then allows resources to develop. The resource perspective is important in the process of mutual influence and mutual accommodation as the reciprocity that takes place presumes that resources are present.

The third assumption in human ecology is that interconnections exist among different parts of settings and that movement in one aspect of a community impacts on other aspects of the community (Trickett, 1984). Bubolz and Sontag (1988) refer to the view of individuals and their environment as an integrated whole, mutually influencing each other. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) focus on the developing person and interactions with the environment also suggests interdependence among people and their environments. This interdependence takes place over time. A longitudinal approach to the belief that community research goes beyond the initial gathering of data is part of the assumption on interdependence (Trickett et al, 1985). This longitudinal approach involves the development of a reciprocal relationship with the community that builds on and extends beyond the initial gathering of data. That commitment to a community over time is operationalized in actions which demonstrate that community research, by being responsive and responsible, can be a participating force in community development over time.

Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bubolz and Sontag (1988) Trickett et al (1985) and Trickett (1984) can be interpreted as having similar meanings attached to their descriptions and assumptions of the human ecological framework. Each author describes the interactions between individuals and their environment. For example, Bubolz and Sontag (1988) refer explicitly to the interactions between individuals, whereas Bronfenbrenner discusses the relationships between individuals and their settings including other individuals. Furthermore, reciprocity or mutual influence or mutual accommodation is described by both Bubolz and Sontag (1988) and Bronfenbrenner (1979). Trickett's (1984), and Trickett et al's (1985) reference to assumptions for the human ecological framework fit within the human ecological framework discussed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Bubolz and Sontag (1988).

The human ecological framework as discussed above focuses on a view of individuals within a broader context with other individuals and with their environment. It views individuals as acting upon their environment, growing, changing, and restructuring the environment as the need arises. The interactions between individuals and their environment is reciprocal, being both mutually accommodating as well as mutually influencing. The environment discussed within the human ecological framework goes beyond the immediate surroundings, and extends to interconnections between settings as well as to external influences from larger surroundings.

Empowerment as a Process

This section discusses empowerment as a process. Several definitions of empowerment are considered in developing a definition of empowerment that is appropriate for the Caragana Project.

Empowerment is a long term process of adult learning and development, wherein many competencies that are already present or possible, are given an opportunity to develop and new competencies are learned in the context of living (Kieffer 1984, Rappaport 1989). Empowerment as a process has been defined by many authors in many different ways. On close examination it becomes apparent that the definitions are similar. Critical reflection, actualizing potential over time, and a view of the individual within a broader context are all elements in definitions of empowerment as a process.

Critical Reflection

Critical reflection, implicit in some definitions, and explicit in others is key to the empowerment process. Critical reflection refers to learning to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to take action where necessary. Freire (1970) describes people's ability for critical reflection as part of the process of empowerment. Critical reflection implies the ability to critically perceive the world. Freire suggests that in problem-solving, individuals develop the ability to critically perceive the way they exist in the world and they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in the process of transformation. This focus on critical reflection by Freire can be seen as the first step necessary to understanding and knowing the world prior to seeing the need to make changes. The concept of critical reflection or critical awareness described by Kieffer (1984, p.29) as "an essential component in developing the capability to competently challenge established systems or political interests" supports Freire's (1970) view of critical reflection as a step in the process of empowerment.

In a discussion of critical reflection which he calls psychological empowerment, Zimmerman (1990) uses the example of an empowered person who may have no real power in the political sense, but understands what choices can be made in different situations and the factors that influence the decision-making process. Although Zimmerman sees this ability to understand choices, and factors that influence the decision making process as key to psychological empowerment, previous definitions presented by other authors suggest that understanding is not enough. However, understanding may be the first step in critical reflection, as described by Freire (1970) and Kieffer (1984) as part of the problem-solving. Nonetheless, it seems important that the understanding be acted upon if there is to be increased control over consequences. Conscious decisions to not take action in a particular circumstance may also be empowering, dependent on the importance of the consequences to the individual or the group.

Actualizing Potential

Actualizing the potential that individuals or groups possess is explicit in definitions used by Kieffer (1984), Freire (1970), West and Parent (1992), Weil and Kruzich (1990), Rappaport (1984), and the Cornell Empowerment Group (1989).

Empowerment as a long term process of adult learning and development is also emphasized by Kieffer (1984). He makes the distinction between empowerment as a development of empowering skills and empowerment as attainment of participatory competence. He views empowerment as attainment of an abiding set of commitments and capacities which can be referred to as "participatory competence." Participatory competence refers to the combination of attitudes, understandings, and abilities required to play a conscious and assertive role in the ongoing social construction of one's political environment.

The view of empowerment as a long term process of adult learning by Kieffer (1984) dovetails with Rappaport's (1984) view that empowerment implies many competencies are already present or possible, given an opportunity, and that new competencies are learned in living life rather than being told what to do by experts. Both Kieffer and Rappaport's views of empowerment, although on an individual level, build on Fawcett, Seekins, Whang, Muiu, and Suarez de Balcazar's (1984) definition of community empowerment. The three intersecting dimensions as described by Kieffer would seem to be necessary for any group to gain control over consequences that are important to them. Group members would need to develop a more positive self concept, both individually and as a group in order to act as a catalyst. Critical analysis is necessary in order for the process to begin and the potential for growth must be present for the process to continue. If the capacity for some critical analysis is not present, there would likely be no impetus for change in the initial stages. The increased critical and analytic understanding of the surrounding environment may evolve as a result of being involved in the process. Cultivation of individual and collective resources for action, will also likely evolve as part of the process, as groups gain increased control over consequences that are important to them. Kieffer's view of empowerment also includes four developmental stages. They are discussed later in this section.

Another view of empowerment as a process by Weil and Kruzich (1990) suggests that in many ways empowerment connotes actualizing the latent powers that an individual or group possesses, enabling them to use their powers more effectively. This view of empowerment fits with that used by Rappaport (1984) in that it implies many competencies already exist, and that building on these powers or competencies is part of the process.

In an examination of consumer empowerment issues in supported employment services, West and Parent (1992) define empowerment as the transfer of power and control over the values, decisions, choices and directions of human services from external entities (i.e., government funding agencies, service providers, social forces, etc.) to the consumers of services. This transfer of power, then, results in increased motivation to participate and succeed, and a greater degree of dignity for the consumer which may be actualizing of the potential that exists within the individuals.

The involvement of individuals in the process of organized action has been described by Batra (1992) as empowerment as a process. New resources are acquired by indirectly imparting the skills and information needed for group action. Batra takes the basic concepts proposed by Fawcett et al (1984), Rappaport (1984), Kieffer (1984), Zimmerman (1990), Weil and Kruzich (1990), and the Cornell Empowerment Group (1989) one step further by viewing the skills gained through the process as a new resource.

The view of empowerment as a developmental process has been described by Kieffer (1984) as the process of moving from powerlessness to participatory competency. He describes four stages of developmental progression: the "era of entry", the "era of advancement", the "era of incorporation" and the "era of commitment". He sees the era of entry as a mobilizing stage where individuals begin to reflect critically about events, activities in their world. The era of advancement involves critical reflection and increased involvement in the learning and creation of political strategies. In the era of incorporation individuals rethink their view of themselves and the role they play in the world. The final phase, the era of commitment is the stage where individuals develop fully realized participatory competency. The actualizing of potential takes place throughout this developmental process described by Kieffer.

Individuals in a Broader Context

The view of the individual within a broader context has been suggested as necessary to empowerment as a process by many authors. Zimmerman (1990), Rappaport (1987) and Fawcett et al (1984) explicitly refer to empowerment as a process going beyond the individual and taking into account the ecological, social, cultural and political contexts. Zimmerman

(1990) refers to empowerment as a theory and discusses two perspectives; individually oriented conceptions of empowerment and psychological empowerment. He refers to psychological empowerment as a contextually oriented conception of empowerment that embraces the notion of person-environment fit. It includes collective action, skill development, and cultural awareness; and incorporates motivation to control, locus of control, and self-efficacy. Rappaport (1984, p.3) suggests that empowerment is easier to define in its absence - alienation, powerlessness, helplessness - but hard to define positively because it "takes on a different form in different people and contexts".

Increasing control by groups over consequences that are important to members of the group and to other members of the larger community which goes beyond the individual level is defined as the process of community empowerment by Fawcett et al (1984). This definition suggests that members of a particular group within a community set the agenda, or identify the issues that are important for the rest of the community. Many questions arise from this definition. The first is whether other members of the community are uninvolved for specific reasons, or simply because they do not view particular consequences as important. There may be an overriding assumption by the group with increasing control that what is important to them is important to all. On the other hand, it may take a small group to provide a catalyst to start the process. Once there is some evidence of positive change because of the group's efforts, the larger community may become involved in the process.

The Cornell Empowerment Group (1989, p.2) define empowerment as "an intentional, ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources". They view empowerment as a process that is ongoing, or evolving so that any outcomes in turn lead to a generative spiral to further participation in the process. These outcomes, at a number of different levels, societal, institutional, personal network, family and individual levels become a foundation on which subsequent outcomes are built. This view also takes into account the individual within a broader context.

In summary, the definitions of empowerment as a process include critical reflection, actualizing of potential over time, and a view of the individual in a broader context. Empowerment for the Caragana Project is defined as a long term process of adult learning and development, wherein many competencies that are already present or possible are given an opportunity to develop, and new competencies are learned in the context of living.

Links Between Human Ecological Framework and Empowerment as a Process

The links between the human ecological framework and empowerment as a process are apparent. Whereas the human ecological framework provides a discussion of interactions of individuals and their environment, empowerment focuses on involvement of individuals in the process of developing their potential through interactions with others and with their environment. Empowerment does not happen in a vacuum. Many authors inferred the link between empowerment and the human ecological framework, but only two (Rappaport, 1987, Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989) explicitly stated the link. Studies on empowerment have focused on a view of empowerment as a process that goes beyond the individual, and takes into account the context in which the individual lives. Both Zimmerman (1990) and Lukes (1974) have proposed that the view of empowerment from the individual level is limiting, and needs to go further to be meaningful as the individual does not live in isolation.

In discussions of empowerment, many authors, (Rappaport 1987, Zimmerman 1990, the Cornell Empowerment Group 1989, Fawcett et al 1984) suggest that research on empowerment needs to cut across disciplines and analysis needs to be completed at all levels of interaction to be meaningful. The study of empowerment across levels suggests links between the human ecological framework and empowerment as a process.

Rappaport (1987) extends the argument for an explicit link between the human ecological framework and empowerment. He proposes empowerment within a human ecological framework as a subject for theory development in order to provide coherence, direction and a focus of attention for further studies. He sees empowerment as a candidate for theoretical development because it captures the essence of a world view and a phenomena of interest. He views empowerment within the human ecological framework as moving away from a person centred approach into a much broader range of contextual understanding, taking the environment into account. This view of empowerment also suggests an interest in role relationships among people, policy, programs and professionals; in change over time; and in the contextual meaning. According to Rappaport, analyzing empowerment as a process implies the need to understand its development in both people and settings over time.

The empowerment process exists at two levels, the individual and the community. Individuals may become empowered through critical reflection and actualizing of potential, which then leads to mutual influence and mutual accommodation within the community. The context in which people live, and how they actualize potential to gain control over the context are the important links to the empowerment process.

Application of Human Ecological Framework Including Empowerment to Caragana Project

Empowerment for the purposes of the Caragana Project, as noted previously, is defined as a long term process of adult learning and development, wherein many competencies that are already present or possible are given an opportunity to develop, and new competencies are learned in the context of living. This definition of empowerment focuses on empowerment as a process, taking into account the potential that exists within individuals and communities, and the contexts in which people live. This view of empowerment allows the research question to be addressed, to ask if assisting community members in identification of issues enables them to become empowered so they continue the process of resolving their issues.

Assumptions for the Caragana Project

The assumptions underlying the Caragana Project were based on empowerment as a process and the three assumptions within the human ecological framework discussed earlier. The three assumptions of human ecology discussed cultural diversity and pluralism as valid and defining qualities of community life and environmental diversity, the importance of resources, and the interconnections that exist among different parts of settings so that movement in one aspect of the community impacts on other aspects of the community. The overriding assumption was that empowerment is a positive value. Rappaport (1984) exemplifies this view by referring to empowerment as a pervasive positive value in our society.

The first assumption for the Caragana Project is that all individuals have competencies and are capable of learning and developing these competencies. This assumption was critical to the Caragana Project as it emphasized a belief in the potential that exists within the individuals in the community, and that this potential can be actualized to enable the communities to resolve their issues. This moved away from reliance on an expert to resolve problems to a self-reliance within the community. This assumption is inherent within definitions of empowerment by Kieffer (1984), Rappaport (1984), Fawcett et al (1984), Weil and Kruzich (1990) and Zimmerman (1990). The Cornell Empowerment Group (1989) explicitly identify a similar assumption; that all individuals have strengths, and that diversity in race, gender, family form, age, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation is positively valued. The differences inherent in the knowledge and skills of individuals involved in the project were seen as resources and the potential for individual growth and learning capitalized on this diversity through individuals interacting with each other. Trickett et al (1985) in a discussion of underlying assumptions in the human ecological framework also referred to cultural diversity as valid and defining qualities of community life. When there is more than one example of competence that is recognized and accessible, the community is expected to have more available resources, adapt more easily to external change, and promote more opportunities for the development of the individuals and the community at large. The definition of empowerment used in the project focuses on these competencies or potential.

The second assumption is that the learning and development of individuals takes place over a life time. Empowerment as a process, the focus of the Caragana Project recognized that the process takes place over time, and the individual or the community is in a continual stage of learning and developing and that outcomes may lead to additional learnings. The data collection stage of the project was seen as the beginning of the process, and the process of resolving the issues would likely continue over time. The process of interacting, influencing and accommodating with others as well as with the environment is part of the learning and developing that takes place over time. Trickett et al (1985) also discuss a longitudinal approach in their assumptions of the human ecological framework. They believe in the development of a reciprocal relationship which the community builds on and extends beyond the initial data gathering. The commitment to a place over time is seen by Trickett et al as necessary to mobilize the process. Longitudinal research, or the study of people and organizations over time, is also seen by Rappaport (1987) to be desirable, and perhaps necessary. He suggests this learning and development takes place through interactions with a number of environmental systems within the context of daily living.

The third assumption is that individuals cannot be studied in isolation, but within the context of living, from different points of view and different levels of analysis. The interactions that take place between individuals and others, and individuals and their environment played a major role in the Caragana Project. Both Lukes (1974) and Zimmerman (1990) propose that the individual level is too limiting, as not taking into consideration the many factors influencing the individual. Inherent within the Caragana Project, as well as within the human ecological framework, is the importance of the context in which individuals live, and the impossibility of separating the two. The view of empowerment from a human ecological framework moves away from individually oriented concepts, to focus on the relationships between individuals and their environment.

Rappaport's (1987) assumption similarly refers to empowerment as a multilevel construct, referring to the study of and relationships within and among levels of analysis, individuals, groups, organizations, and other settings, communities, and social policies. Mutual influence and mutual accommodation are implied across levels of analysis. The Cornell Group (1989) addresses this assumption as well. They state that human beings develop through interactions with a number of environmental systems, which can be specified. They do not, however, explicitly address the mutual influence process or discuss that the process takes place over time. Zimmerman (1990), Rappaport (1987), and Fawcett et al (1984), also suggest the need for empowerment to be studied across disciplines and levels of analysis to be meaningful. Within the Caragana Project, empowerment was viewed as a multilevel construct, in order to focus on relationships between and among groups, and relationships among individuals, and groups and the immediate community, the institutions, and surrounding settings.

The fourth assumption is that the historical and cultural context in which individuals operate should be taken into account. For the Caragana Project, this assumption was important so that the empowerment process could build on past successes and avoid past regrets. What had happened previously was taken into account so that the context for empowerment was clear. The historical context in which the project operated had an important influence on the expected results. Trickett (1984) in a discussion of assumptions of the human ecological framework, described this as succession or understanding how history has contributed to the current setting, and how history provides a perspective for couching decisions about immediate action within a longer time frame. The history and culture moves beyond the individual level as suggested by Zimmerman (1990) and Lukes (1974). Rappaport (1987) suggests that the "before" - the beginning of any project is necessary to understand its place in the community, so that any results can be generalizable. Furthermore, Rappaport (1987) also makes the assumption that the cultural context matters. He suggests that individuals as well as settings bring with them a variety of cultural assumptions, and that match or mismatch between people and settings is of consequence. Therefore, assumptions that people bring with them are acknowledged as a starting point.

The fifth assumption is that values, goals, attitudes, beliefs, and intentions be shared among individuals to create a collaborative relationship. The team involved in the Caragana Project worked closely together, to attain some mutual goals as well as some individual goals. It was necessary to share these goals amongst team members to create a collaborative working relationship. The community members became collaborators, and the researchers become participants. Serrano-Garcia's (1984) analysis of empowerment strategies is inherent in the empowerment process used in the Caragana Project. The "expert" role was abandoned so that validity was placed on the participation of all individuals in the project. Rappaport's (1987) view of empowerment theory as self-consciously a world view theory is inherent in this assumption. Embodied in this view are the values, goals, attitudes, beliefs and intentions of individuals who hold this world view. Rappaport suggests these values, goals, attitudes, beliefs and intentions be shared as much as possible.

The sixth assumption is that settings that have opportunities for individuals to participate are more likely to be empowering. Providing opportunities for community participation was critical to the Caragana Project, both on the project team as well as during the data collection phase of the project. Rappaport (1987) assumes that potential for participation in a setting will have an impact on the empowerment of the members. Those who participated in decisions and activities that were meaningful to them were more likely to become empowered. Settings that encourage empowerment, as well as the history and culture of the person will mediate the impact of the intervention, as will the history and culture of the setting according to Rappaport.

Any solutions developed internally by individuals are more likely to be empowering than those developed externally is the seventh assumption for the Caragana Project. Every situation and all individuals in communities are unique. By assisting the community in the initial identification of issues, opportunities were available for community members in the Caragana Project to develop solutions to the issues identified. Rappaport (1987) assumes that the solutions that come from individuals within a community are more likely to focus on the uniqueness of the setting and the individuals. Rappaport goes on to suggest the size of the setting matters. The project setting was small enough to provide meaningful roles for all individuals, yet large enough to obtain resources and, as such, was hypothesized as more likely to create conditions that lead to empowerment.

The eighth assumption is that empowerment tends to build a base of resources that allows individuals, organizations and communities to become increasingly self-reliant. As the purpose of the Caragana Project was to assist the community in developing the potential to resolve their own issues, it can be assumed that this potential became a resource. Trickett et al (1985), in their discussion of values or underlying assumptions of the human ecological framework, view individuals as a resource with potential for solving their own issues. This assumption aligns with assumptions in definitions of empowerment used by Kieffer (1984), Freire (1970), West and Parent (1992), Weil and Kruzich (1990), Rappaport (1984), Cornell Empowerment Group

(1984), and Batra (1992). The emphasis in the Caragana Project was on a team approach with an acceptance and recognition of each member's competence, with opportunities to learn from each other given the varied backgrounds and experiences of members of the team. In the analysis of empowerment strategies proposed by Serrano-Garcia (1984), as with the empowerment process evident in the Caragana Project, power was shared by members with a continuous dialogue toward common issues that were seen as resolvable. Rappaport's (1987) view of empowerment focuses on empowerment as tending to expand resources which supports the view of empowerment as a process.

The overriding assumption for the Caragana Project, as stated at the beginning of this section, is that empowerment is a positive value. The overriding assumptions along with the other eight assumptions provide the underpinnings for operationalizing the project. The assumptions focused on empowerment as a process within a human ecological framework, the competencies that exist within individuals, and their ability to actualize these competencies. The assumptions extended beyond individuals and took into account the context in which individuals live, and the relationships within and between settings. Settings with opportunities for participation were assumed to be empowering, wherein individuals develop and become a resource.

In conclusion, the conceptual framework for the Caragana Project was based on a human ecological framework. The human ecological framework provides a broad context that takes into account the interactions individuals have with others and with their environment. The view of empowerment as a process fits within the human ecological framework.

The definition of empowerment used for the Caragana Project is a long term process of adult learning and development, wherein many competencies which are already present or possible are given an opportunity to develop and new competencies are learned in the context of living. It is assumed that individuals and communities have the potential to resolve issues within their community. Providing a catalyst for actualizing this potential was the objective of the Caragana Project.

III. Method

The primary research method used in the Caragana Project was social action research. Social action research (SAR), integrated with principles of rapid rural appraisal (RRA) in the Caragana Project, provided a flexible, quick and relatively inexpensive way of assisting a community in identifying issues. Social action research is often described as a way of critically learning about events in this world in order to change them (Bawden, 1989). The term social action research is used interchangeably with the terms action research and participatory action research as they are described in the literature.

Techniques used for gathering data for the Caragana Project were focus groups and semi-structured interviews. In addition to these techniques, this study also included meeting minutes, activities initiated and ongoing, and personal communication to collect data.

Social Action Research

Action research is the integration of science and practise using research to solve everyday problems (Lewin 1952; Argyris, Putnam and Mclain-Smith 1985). One of the founders of action research, Lewin, saw it as research in action that contributes both to basic knowledge in social science and social action in everyday life. He described action research as a process or as a spiral of steps. Each of the steps consists of planning, acting, observing and evaluating the result of the action. Action research begins with the assumption by team members that some kind of change is desirable. It continues with identifying issues of mutual concern and then working together on these issues. The spiral of steps makes action research responsive and flexible so that changes can be made throughout the process in response to the previous step. This flexibility is necessary to take into account the complexity of social problems. Given the complexity of social problems, it is often difficult to anticipate everything that needs to be done, so that while one step is occurring it is also being observed and evaluated. This deliberate overlapping of action and reflection by Lewin takes into account the continued need for changes in plans of action as individuals learn from their own experience.

Lewin (1952) saw group decision and commitment to improvement as two ideas critical to action research. Action research focuses on the way groups of people organize the conditions under which they can learn from their own experiences, and make this experience accessible to others.

Contemporary researchers have elaborated on Lewin's (1952) idea of action research. Argyris, Putnam and Mclain-Smith (1985) articulate a number of themes present in action research which reiterate and expound upon Lewin's (1952) discussion. The first theme involves using research on real problems in social systems, and focusing on a particular problem to provide assistance to the client system. They, like Lewin (1952) see iterative cycles of identifying a problem, planning, acting and evaluating. Another theme, reeducation, refers to changing patterns of thinking and acting that are already well established in individuals or groups. The effectiveness of this reeducation depends on participation by individuals in diagnosis and fact finding along with free choice to engage in new kinds of action. The last theme Argyris et al address is that action research is intended to contribute simultaneously to basic knowledge in social science and to social action in everyday life. Both Lewin (1952) and

Argyris et al (1985) view action research as integrating research with everyday problems or research in action.

The term participatory action research has been used interchangeably to describe social action research methods. Participatory action research emphasizes collaboration with the people who are seeking change (McTaggart, 1991). As described by Lewin (1952), Argyris et al (1985), Wright (1992), the process begins with a problem people want to solve; it is they who define the subject of study. The result, according to Wright, should be collective action for social change, so that people use their new information and understanding to gain increased control over their lives.

The collaborative nature of social action research, and the involvement of team members in each step was an important aspect of the Caragana Project. Tandon (1988) identified three criteria for true participation in research: having a role in setting the agenda for the research, participation in the data collection and analysis, and control over the use of outcomes and the whole process. Participatory action research is concerned simultaneously with changing both individuals and the culture of the groups, institutions, and societies to which they belong (McTaggart, 1991). The change is not imposed. Individuals work together to change themselves both individually and as a group. Their interest in change is motivated by a common problem.

Contemporary researchers have added a condensed time frame to social action research through a method called rapid rural appraisal (RRA). The iterative nature of social action research in an RRA project provides individual flexibility so that changes can be made quickly based on the ongoing needs of the group and experiences gained throughout the research. RRA is usually used to avoid long and costly research as well as to encourage participation of local people. RRA is very rapid. It usually lasts between four days and three weeks (Beebe 1985). The intent of combining social action research with rapid rural appraisal is to help researchers and community members learn more effectively, modify models, understand rural people, themselves and the larger systems in which individuals function, in a more profound and human way (Jamieson 1985). The concentrated focus for a short time period highlights the goals of social action research and enhances the flexibility in the process, so that changes can be made quickly. As the project was ongoing, the use of a rapid rural appraisal approach was seen as the first step in the information gathering providing an opportunity to collect a large amount of information in a short time period.

Many different techniques are used to collect data in social action research and rapid rural appraisal. Focus groups, semi-structured interviews, or a series of interviews all include the involvement of participants in the process and emphasize the collaborative nature of social action research. Serrano-Garcia (1984), in a community development experience in Puerto Rico with empowerment as a goal, interviewed key members of the community. Kieffer (1984), in a study of emerging citizen leaders in grass roots organizations used a series of interviews with an opportunity for participants to comment on transcripts of each interview. Wright (1992), in a case study of a village with a failed water supply and the role of rural community development in achieving social change, conducted interviews with individual local residents and meetings with local authorities. The exchange of information resulted in the development of a plan of action that was refined with residents in subsequent interviews.

In keeping with empowerment as a process, the techniques chosen for the gathering of information for the Caragana Project focused on involving members of the community through focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews. The techniques used emphasized the collaborative nature of the project. Focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews provided an opportunity to talk to many individuals in the community and for individuals to identify their issues to members of the project team. The focus groups represented a cross-section of the community as a whole, and provided a glimpse into the relationships between individuals and their community. Semi-structured interviews complemented the focus groups and provided a more detailed understanding of the issues, as individuals elaborated on the issues in more detail.

Social action research was chosen as the method for the Caragana Project as it is congruent with empowerment as a process within the human ecological framework. The focus on the way groups of people identify issues of mutual concern and work together to resolve them, takes into account the context in which people live, and the way they actualize competencies to gain control over the context.

Wright (1992) suggests the result of social action research is collective action for social change, so that people use new understanding and information to gain control over their lives. This increased control infers that competencies already exist, and can be actualized through social action research. The collaborative nature of participatory action research identified by Serrano Garcia (1984) is a strategy for empowerment. She describes a mutual relationship between change agent and participant which creates genuine dialogue between those involved in the process. The commitment to improvement and group decision making, key to social action research have also been identified as key strategies for the empowerment process (Serrano-Garcia 1984).

Many principles from social action research (Lewin 1952, Argyris et al 1985) and rapid rural appraisal (Beebe 1985, Longhurst 1987) are used in the Caragana Project. These include involving local people to increase participation in the process, learning from local community members, limiting the amount of information collected, exploring the range of circumstances, investigating an issue in different ways, and providing an informal approach which is iterative.

Empowerment defined for the Caragana Project, appears to be inherent in social action research. Social action research is conducted in a number of steps, with an emphasis on the need to be flexible and responsive, given that one can never anticipate nor predict each step. Empowerment as a process does not have a prescribed set of steps, but can also be viewed as a spiral. It is not possible to anticipate nor predict the actualizing of competencies within the process, and much of the process is reflexive or built on the learnings people experience as in social action research.

The very nature of the social action research begins with an identification of the need for change which implies critical reflection. Critical reflection, as discussed earlier, is identified explicitly (Freire, 1970; Kieffer, 1984; Zimmerman, 1990; Lukes, 1974) as a part of the empowerment process. Critical reflection is necessary so that the process can begin.

In the Caragana Project, community members were an integral part of the project team. Emphasis was placed on providing opportunities for team members to learn from each other, and build on the skills and abilities of each other. Due to time and financial restraints, the amount of information to be collected in the Caragana Project was limited to what could be accomplished in an eight day time frame. The use of a number of focus groups and some semi-structured interviews provided a cross-section of perspectives within the community, including social, educational, and political perspectives. Changes in the Caragana Project were made in response to the expressed needs of individual team members. The team approach, building on the diversity of backgrounds and experiences, and doing most of the work in the field, are key principles of RRA used in the Caragana Project (Beebe, 1985).

Background to the Caragana Project

History of the Project

The Caragana Project began as a collaboration between researchers in Australia and a researcher in Canada. Two years of planning, negotiation, conference calls, correspondence and electronic mail resulted in three Australian researchers from the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, travelling to Alberta to collaborate on the Caragana project. Professors Stephen Blunden, Dennis Gamble, and Lesley White initially contacted Dr. Norah Keating, University of Alberta, in December 1990 while she was on sabbatical in Australia and New Zealand. Their interest focused on amalgamating their research methods with Dr. Keating's qualitative research methods, to learn from and work with each other. Dr. Keating agreed to explore project and funding possibilities upon her return to Canada.

Based on their previous experiences, the Australian team had a number of suggestions for the project (S. Blunden, D. Gamble, personal communication, November 13, 1991). It was suggested the project involve seven stages; preparation, planning and training of the team, a research period, documentation, feedback to respondents and debate on the issues and avenues of reaction. A three week time frame was proposed, with some follow up recommended after the three weeks. Each day of data collection was to be followed by a day of analysis. The membership of the team was seen as critical with an emphasis on community participation. Criteria for team membership focused on three areas: a high level of commitment, access to resources to see the project to completion, and ability to take action.

A guide to what would be involved in the project (S. Blunden, D. Gamble, personal communication, November 13, 1991) was based on the methodology used by the Australian team in previous research projects. The Australians had successfully used rapid rural appraisal in previous projects, and the rapid time frame was suggested due to time and financial constraints, as well as to provide a concentrated focus on collaboration and flexibility in the data collection stage.

A Community Partner

A contact by Dr. Keating with extension staff of Alberta Agriculture resulted in a keen interest in the project. Their participation in the project provided a knowledge of local conditions as well as an entry to rural communities in Barrhead and district. A meeting in February of 1992 with representatives from Alberta Agriculture resulted in the identification of three communities with potential for involvement in the project. All three communities are in northern Alberta. A concern about social and economic resources was a major issue for all three communities.

The needs of each of the communities in social development and mental health, community education, and referral services were discussed. The possibility of enhancing intercommunity relations, and potential barriers to developing a spirit of goodwill among community interests were also discussed.

One community was identified initially as a most likely candidate for the project. However, because that community had already identified a number of their issues and were on the way to resolving them, it was agreed that an important part of the process had already taken place. The community had organized to take action and had provided their own catalyst.

The second community identified as a possibility had some issues with Barrhead, the nearest urban community. The building of a large multi-use facility in Barrhead had the potential to impact on the use and support of halls in the rural community. Rural families saw this as an issue, although urban people appeared to be unconcerned. This community was considered a potential candidate for the project at this point by Alberta Agriculture representatives. Contact with the community residents had not been made at this time.

The third community, with a population of 214, had not met or organized as a community to identify their issues. However representatives from Alberta Agriculture saw the community as a potential candidate due to issues they had observed in the community. The major issues identified by representatives from Alberta Agriculture were the disbanding of the local Agricultural Society and the movement from village to hamlet status. Lack of agreement between the recreation board and the Agricultural Society regarding the use of the arena seemed to have resulted in a lack of a sense of community. Concerns had also been expressed that high school students were bussed to schools outside the community and the community school could not survive with declining enrollment.

A meeting was held in March 1992 with members in the third community to discuss the needs of the community and the potential for involvement in a project. The meeting between Alberta Agriculture representatives and eight community members, (including one member from the Agricultural Society and a member of the county council) resulted in the identification of several issues by the community members.

The issues identified went beyond the individual framework and took into account the context in which the individuals live. Issues related to schools and government, the community, the politics of the community, the relationships between members of the community and relationships between community groups.

Children not attending local schools due to lack of education options, such as French language training, was identified as an issue. A concern was expressed that outlying communities were deteriorating as the town of Barrhead grew. Community members stated that the number of levels of government sometimes made it difficult to operate facilities and services. For example, the school system was run by the county, but is geographically within the improvement district (I.D.). A change in status of the community was seen as an issue, with the community recently having moved from village back to hamlet status. Members of the community disagreed as to whether this was positive or negative.

Community members at the meeting felt it was difficult to have a sense of community. The community consists of several smaller communities, each of which has a facility, such as a community hall. The largest of these is the identified community with a population of 214. Community members felt that the sense of community was fractured, and it was difficult to keep facilities operational with such a low population and so many groups. The community is a distance from employment since it is a thirty minute drive to Barrhead or a ninety minute drive to Whitecourt. This distance contributes to the lack of a sense of community, as many people are employed outside the community.

Volunteers burn out quickly in the area. There are 27 community groups in the area, and only 1,100 people, so that many of the same people volunteer in many organizations.

There is ongoing tension between the two major community groups because the Agricultural Society owns the hall/arena, but the Recreation Board administers it. The Agricultural Society used to operate the facility, but the Recreation Board felt they did not do enough. Community members felt there was no sense of ownership of the community building. It was constructed with money from various grants which included funding for janitorial services. However, the building is getting run down, and no one seems to care.

A number of positive features of the community were also identified including the people, the history of the community and the tourism potential. Tourism potential for the area is positive, with a great interest in ecotourism. The sand hills were identified as needing to be preserved as a tourist attraction. There is a keen interest in environmental issues and pride in the history of the area. It is one of the oldest forts in the province, and is the geographic centre of the province. Another positive feature identified was the people in the area who see themselves as being both diverse and creative. Many highly educated people, including agriculturalists and artisans reside in the area.

The community members at the meeting expressed excitement about being involved in the project and the possibility for change. They stated that if a result of such a project would be that people started talking with each other they would be pleased. As a result of the issues identified, and the keen interest and support of community members, a mutual decision was made to conduct the project in this community. Had the community members not been interested in the project, the process would have halted at this point. In keeping with social action research and empowerment as a process, it was critical that the community identify a need for change so that the decision to proceed was mutual. The collaboration with community members at this first step could be viewed as the beginning of the empowerment process, which involved critical reflection, or seeing the need for change. The residents of the other potential communities for the project were not contacted as their potential for the project had only been discussed between Alberta Agriculture and University of Alberta representatives. The communities had not been involved in of the preliminary discussions.

Discussion of funding possibilities and talks with local politicians resulted in an application to the Agricultural Initiatives Committee. The Community Agricultural Society, a non-profit group, sponsored the application. Alberta Agriculture coordinated the funding proposal. The application for funding through the Agriculture Initiatives fund was approved, and provided monies for food and lodging for the team as well as for the presentation to the community which involved a brunch.

Setting the Stage

The first gathering of the Canadian members of the research team took place in May 1992, in the community. Four members of the community, three from Alberta Agriculture, and four from the University of Alberta attended. The purpose of the day was to build a team through participation in the project design, introduce the team to the researching approach and techniques, and to work out specific details of the data collection phase of the project in July. It was agreed that because of the keen interest in the project, the project team would include 12-13 members.

Emphasis at this meeting was placed on the importance of all team members, and the opportunity to learn from and with each other. This emphasis on collaboration and involvement of the community members in each step of the process is key to social action research. The emphasis on equal participation by all team members is one of the strategies identified by Serrano-Garcia (1984) in the empowerment process, and one of the underlying assumptions for the Caragana Project.

Planning responsibilities were discussed with team members, with Alberta Agriculture staff agreeing to take responsibility for most of the logistics and equipment. The community members of the team, along with other community members, agreed to set up and organize the interviews and focus groups. Community members identified sixteen possible groups of people for focus groups. Newspaper articles and advertising of the Caragana Project were to be joint efforts of community members and Alberta Agriculture. A coordinator from Alberta Agriculture, was also identified to organize the participation of the respondents, venues, accommodations, vehicles and other details in cooperation with the community members. Out of town team members were to be lodged together at a Motor Inn to maximumize opportunities for interaction.

A plan for the research period of the project was presented to the Canadian members of the team by the representatives from Alberta Agriculture. The project was scheduled for an

8 day time period, July 9-18, 1992, in keeping with the principles of rapid rural appraisal. A proposed schedule for the project (Appendix A) was presented.

The Caragana Project Unfolds

Team Membership

The final project team included twelve members from four distinct groups. The diversity of the groups was seen as valuable based on the first assumption for the Caragana Project, that all individuals have competencies and are capable of learning and developing these competencies. From the community there were two members who had been involved in the project from the initial stages and one newcomer to the project. Two other community members who had also been involved initially were unable to make the commitment of time due to other constraints. The members from Alberta Agriculture included a district home economist and family resource specialist from Barrhead, and a district home economist from another county. The University of Alberta members included two graduate students and an undergraduate student in Family Studies.

Dr. Norah Keating, who had been the initiator of the project in Canada was to attend for the 1½ days of orientation for team members, and for days seven and eight, but would not participate in any of the information-gathering. Community members had expressed some concerns after the May meeting regarding the number of people from the University involved in the project. Because the fifth assumption focused on the collaborative relationship between researcher and community, it was necessary to look at ways to reduce the number of people from the University of Alberta. As Dr. Keating also had time constraints, she chose to step back from the actual process, but remain involved in the orientation and the final presentation to the community. The team members from the University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury, included Professors Stephen Blunden, Dennis Gamble, and Lesley White from the Faculty of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Although all members of the team were committed to the project, a number of underlying agendas were present. These included community members wanting to resolve issues, graduate students gathering data for theses, government members piloting a project they hoped would identify a process for future projects, and an opportunity for the Australians to conduct research in another country.

The project team was larger than the 8-10 member team recommended by the Australian team due to the keen interest in the project by the community, Alberta Agriculture representatives and University of Alberta students. The team represented a diversity of backgrounds and experiences. Rapid rural appraisal emphasizes having a team from a range of different disciplines so that a broad range of conceptual bases can be brought to the interviews and data (Beebe, 1985).

Data Collection

Day One

The Team in the Community.

The data collection phase began with a 1½ day orientation for the project team. The whole team met for the first time on Thursday, July 9, 1992, in the Motor Inn in the community. The Motor Inn became the project base for the next week. Team members from out of town were also accommodated at the Motor Inn.

The purpose of the orientation was to focus on team building, orient team members to the process, and develop a flow chart of questions to be used as guidelines for the interviews. The intent was also to provide opportunities for participation for all team members in the planning of the process. The pairing of team members, refinement of the schedule, and selection of interviews for each pair was also to take place during this time. The flow chart included such things as points to remember during the interviews, ground rules, general and specific questions to ask each group and individual. A demonstration focus group was also planned for the orientation. Ideas for a presentation of responses to the community, and a wrap up to the week were also on the agenda. One of the assumptions for the Caragana Project was that settings with opportunities for participation are more likely to provide opportunities for empowerment, so that involving community members as part of the project team as well as the response was seen as essential.

Day one began with a brief history of the project, introductions by individual team members, and reasons for individual's participation in the project. The assumptions for the project were not articulated to the team as such, but were referred to throughout the process. Concerns were expressed by one team member that the telephone script (Appendix B) used to recruit volunteers for the focus groups was misleading. The script did not specify that there were other agendas for the project, and the research nature of the project was unknown to the community. "It cannot be another useless report two years down the road" was another comment voiced by a team member. The concerns expressed were addressed as valid, in keeping with the assumption that all participation is valid, and the assumption that sharing of values, goals, attitudes, beliefs and intentions are inherent in a view of empowerment and necessary to create the collaborative nature necessary for the project. The Australian team members outlined some of their previous projects, the emphasis on working with people in the community and the aim of the project. It was emphasized that the objective of the project was to help the community understand issues and develop a plan of action so that the project was a catalyst for resolving issues within the community.

It was reiterated that the project would help to build richer pictures of the community, and that once the first draft of the interviews were circulated, participants would be asked for comments on the draft report. The opportunity for feedback by participants is part of the reflexive nature of social action research, so that the spiral of steps is based on experiences gained through the process. Although some members appeared uncomfortable with some of the expressed concerns, the focus on the mutual benefits of the projects to both the community and team members seemed to allay the concerns. This focus on the mutual accommodation and mutual influence that the project would involve is explicit within the interactions previously identified in the human ecological framework.

Techniques for Gathering Information.

As social action research focuses on involvement of members in the process, talking with the community members was identified as an opportunity to collaborate with them. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were identified as ways of obtaining information from community participants. Providing opportunities for participation by community members was seen as more likely to provide opportunities for empowerment, the sixth assumption for the project.

In using RRA, techniques are chosen according to appropriateness to the research, the amount of time available for reaching decisions, what needs to be known and with what degree of accuracy, the financial resources available, and what is the end use of the information (Longhurst, 1987). Focus groups and semi-structured interviews were used in the Caragana Project as they represent two complementary ways to build, diverge, gather data and build a rich picture (Gamble, 1989). Participation by the community in focus groups and semi-structured interviews is used to help inform the next step as well as to gather data. Focus groups and semi-structured interviews focus on what people do and what they think.

The semi-structured interview gathers data from an individual, on a one to one basis. Data gathered through a semi-structured interview have also been used to help interviewees articulate their own situation and take action. Semi-structured interviews were used in the Caragana Project as a way of obtaining information from the community members in a more private setting on the issues in the community.

Topics in a semi-structured interview usually include broad questions which are replicated in each interview. The diversity of backgrounds, values, experiences and educational training of the individuals being interviewed allows the building of a rich picture from their different experiences. Each interview is different, dependent on the individual's background and views of the world (Bawden, 1989).

The focus group gathers data from small groups of people, and has most often been used to gather information on marketing a product (Morgan, 1988). The focus group is a qualitative approach to gathering data through interviews with small groups of participants about a specific issue, problem, experience or phenomenon (Gamble, 1989). The key to the focus group interview is the discussion which occurs amongst participants. The observer must look beyond what they say in an attempt to understand their response.

The facilitator plays a different role in focus groups and semi-structured interviews. In focus groups the facilitator's role is neutral, focusing on the interplay between participants rather than having a conversation, as in the semi-structured interview. Consensus among participants in focus groups is not important, rather the focus is on the array of responses, and what is behind them. Both techniques focus on a few key questions that are flexible and dependent on the flow of the interview. In a complementary way, focus groups and semi-structured interviews help to build a picture from the community itself (Gamble, 1989).

Refining the Schedule and Negotiating Roles.

A review and some revisions to the scheduling of the focus groups and semi-structured interviews followed the discussion of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. An immense amount of preplanning had taken place in the community before all members of the team arrived. Advertising in the local newspaper, and postings in prominent places alerted members of the community to the project. One community member had initiated a fan-out telephone recruitment to members of various groups within the community. The groups had previously been identified by community members and representatives from Alberta Agriculture at one of the earlier meetings. The sixteen groups represented a cross-section of the community and included: seniors, school administrators and teachers, young people, parents, business/entrepreneurs, established farmers, young farmers, holistic resource management group members, non-agricultural/acreage owners, forestry and community group members, church groups, new arrivals, recreation group members, local government, and people providing local services. The diversity of groups took into account relationships within and between individuals, groups, organizations, and other settings and communities. The emphasis at looking beyond the individual, and taking into account the context in which people live was evident in the cross-section of the members of the focus groups that included people from a number of different interest groups as well as local government and educational institutions.

The telephone committee had been asked to complete initial contact with community members by June 26, and to confirm participation one week prior to the project. A minimum of 6-8 people for each focus group was recommended to ensure an effective discussion. A date, time and place had been scheduled for each of the focus groups and the semi-structured interviews. Interview locations included many of the local sites within the community including the seniors drop-in centre, the school library, the Fort Motor Inn conference room, the Improvement District Office, and recreation hall, as well as private homes.

Further refining of the groups took place with much discussion and negotiation among members of the team. The community group and recreation group were merged due to the small number of participants in each, and possible similarity of interests. The church group was deleted from the list as the recruiters were unable to locate any participants. The new arrivals group was also low in members. However, a team member offered to make some additional phone calls to enlist people. Although representatives from forestry were initially identified as a possible focus group, only one person was available, so a semi-structured interview was scheduled. The final schedule included 12 focus groups and 6 semi-structured interviews. One of the semi-structured interviews was cancelled as the participant could not be available at the scheduled time, and it was impossible to reschedule due to time constraints.

The schedule for the project for the week was revised (Appendix C) with all interviews scheduled for a three day time period and time blocked off after each interview for each interview team to prepare a summary of the interview, so that information gained could be used to influence the next step in the process and changes could be made as needed. Time for the team to meet as a group was scheduled for day six to pull out the themes and develop a presentation for the community.

Guidelines for the focus groups were discussed with the Australian team members taking the lead. Roles of team members in the interviews were emphasized, with a facilitator and recorder required for each focus group or semi-structured interview. The Australian team suggested that community members not act as facilitators, as participants need to feel safe and may not feel free to comment with members of their own community. Although this suggestion could have been viewed as disempowering, community members did not appear to take issue with this suggestion and indeed may have felt some relief. Emphasis on the skills and roles of different members provided opportunities for them to participate in the equally important observing and recording parts of the interviews. The number of interviews each day, the taping of interviews, the questions, and the seating arrangements for the interviews was also discussed (Appendix D).

The scheduling or pairing of the team members for the interviews took place by initially asking who was interested in being a facilitator. The opportunity for participation as a facilitator could be seen as part of the empowerment process, as there was an assumption that all project team members had the competencies to facilitate, and community members were only excluded to ensure maximum opportunities for participation by other community members. Other community members may have felt more comfortable responding to questions from a stranger rather than a neighbour or a friend. The first wave who volunteered, excluding the three community members, included one representative from Alberta Agriculture and the three Australians. Another member from Alberta Agriculture screened herself out as facilitator due to her role as coordinator of the project, and the need to be free of other responsibilities. As it became obvious the interviews could not be completed without more facilitators, the two graduate students and the remaining Alberta Agriculture member agreed to be facilitators. The apparent reluctance may have been due to unfamiliarity with the group or the process.

The facilitators were asked to identify groups they would like to interview, again allowing individuals to choose, and assuming the competencies exist. After going around the table and scheduling all the groups with facilitators, recorders were requested for each group. One group did not have a facilitator. The coordinator agreed to facilitate a focus group. Team members not acting as facilitators or recorders were then scheduled as observers in the groups chosen by them. The scheduling was recorded on flip chart paper at the front of the room. The process was somewhat laborious as the scheduling had to take into account three team members for each group who had to be free in the time slot following the interview to do the analysis or interpretation of the interview.

This schedule was further revised the following morning when one of the community team members reported an expressed disappointment by a community member that one of the

Australians would not be present at the interview in her home. Recognition of the significance of the Australian's involvement, and responsiveness to the needs of the community, critical in social action research resulted in revising the schedule so that an Australian was present at each of the interviews in one of the roles as facilitator, recorder or observer. The final schedule of focus groups and semi-structured interviews is in Appendix E.

Although there had previously been mention of the need for high energy level for facilitators, there did not appear to be other criteria applied, other than who was comfortable facilitating. This may have been a way to self-select or self-screen, or enable individuals to actualize their potential in an empowering process. It is not clear if the reluctance to volunteer was due to lack of skills or comfort level. However, the process could be seen as empowering as there appeared to be an assumption that all were capable of acting as a facilitator and that opportunities for participation were available for all team members.

The finalization of the schedule marked the end of the first day together as a team. Members seemed tired, no doubt due to the high energy level expended as the project plan evolved, members got to know each other and anxieties were reduced. As the team, with the exception of the community members, was staying at the Fort Motor Inn, after a break, the group met for supper in the dining room. This unstructured time was spent getting to know each other, with much discussion about differences between Australia and Canada.

Throughout the process emphasis was placed on the collaboration of all members of the team, and the interdependence and interaction necessary to put the project together, key to the human ecological framework. Negotiation throughout the refinement of the schedule involved team members in various ways, from recording to scheduling the actual interviews. Importance was placed on the learning members would gain from each other, and that each member's view was valid and legitimate. Attempts were made to foster active collaboration and the promotion of participants self-interests (Keiffer 1984), as well as to abandon the expert role, so that decisions and actions were carried out with participants (Serrano-Garcia, 1985).

Day Two

Working together as a Team.

On the second day, members greeted each other warmly and showed interest in each other as they met in the conference room. After revisions to the schedule to ensure an Australian was present at each session, there was a discussion regarding the analysis of the focus group interviews. Concerns were expressed that the team could not truly analyze the responses as it is difficult to know for sure the intent behind respondents' comments. One of the Australian team clarified that the analysis was really more of an interpretation, translation, or summary of participants' comments by pulling out themes.

As some team members were not familiar with focus groups, a demonstration focus group was suggested as the next step. The demonstration focus group was intended to establish an awareness for all team members of the roles in the focus group, the types of questions that are asked, and the discussion that ensues. The demonstration also emphasized the importance of all team members' participation as valid and legitimate with a move away from the expert role, and toward collaboration.

For this demonstration one of the Australian members acted as facilitator, and one as recorder. The four community members, and one representative from Alberta Agriculture participated in the focus group and the remaining members of the team were observers. The recording was done on a flip chart for observation purposes. The questions started out very broad, and then became narrower.

To provide a framework for analysis of the responses, the acronym SWOT was used, focusing on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the community, as a guideline. The team broke into 4 groups and each group listed all of the responses on flip chart paper under one of the SWOT categories. The sheets were posted and the team members asked to review and add anything that was missing. Some team members expressed frustration concerning the clarity of the process. One team member suggested the need for a focus group road map to ensure all team members were comfortable with focus groups. It was agreed that the development of the topics or questions would help to provide the road map.

A brainstorming session of ways to open a focus group was the beginning of the road map. Ideas were recorded on a flip chart. The brainstorming led to development of the questions and topics used for the interviews. The questions revolved around issues previously identified by community members. The questions were typed and copied by the coordinator for each team member for day three. The questions developed went through some refinement, and focused on the past, present and future in the community. Emphasis was placed on the questions being used as a guideline, the need for flexibility, and using the facilitator's words. The list of questions is contained in Appendix F.

The process for the development of the questions as well as the questions themselves were based on a number of the underlying assumptions for the project. The assumption that all individuals have competencies, and that there is value in the potential that exists within individuals and communities was inherent. The team approach to development of the questions assumed the competencies existed at the individual level and the questions themselves assumed a value for the potential that exists within the community. The questions focused on an approach across time, e.g., Tell me what has been happening in your community over the past 5-10 years. Tell me what is it like to be a ______ in this community. If you look 5-10 years down the road, what do you see in regard to these concerns? This approach encompassed two assumptions for the project: that learning and development of individuals is a life long process and that the historical and cultural context in which a person operates are important. The focus on collaboration, and equal participation, as well as opportunities for participation for all members of the team were underlying assumptions for the process of developing the questions. These assumptions were not articulated, but were seen as inherent to the process. The focus on collaboration, and involvement of all team members is also a key element in social action research, so that the group can work together toward a mutual goal.

Once the questions were agreed to, emphasis was placed on setting the scene for the interview: the opening, establishing a comfortable environment, and requesting permission to tape. A reminder was given to all team members that, at the end of the interview, participants were to be invited to attend the brunch on day eight for a summary of the responses. Participants able to attend the brunch were to be given tickets.

Day two ended with a review of the equipment to ensure everyone was familiar with operating the tape recorders. An agreement was reached to reconvene in the conference room at 8:30 a.m. on day three to discuss any last minute concerns, gather equipment and review interview questions.

The weekend provided a break for team members and time to prepare for the intensity and excitement of the week ahead.

Days Three, Four and Five

The Caragana Project in Motion.

Early morning on day three the team gathered in the conference room at the Fort Motor Inn. One last check-in with each other, review, questions and check of equipment took place before members went out to their first interview. Anxiety was expressed by some team members not familiar with the interview process. This appeared to be balanced by their excitement that the Caragana Project was actually in motion.

A total of eleven focus groups, and five semi-structured interviews were held between day three and day five. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from 2-10. One of the scheduled focus groups, the newcomers, was changed to a semi-structured interview. Despite one team member's additional efforts to recruit participants, only one newcomer showed up. Because of the assumptions that settings with opportunities are more likely to be empowering, and the validity placed on participation of each individual, the value placed on the one newcomer's participation was evident with the change from a focus group to a semi-structured interview.

In the time block immediately following each focus group or semi-structured interview, each interview team met to construct a summary of the interview. The summary included a description of the participants, a summary of the comments of participants, and common themes emerging from the participants' comments. As each participant's comments were considered valid, and in keeping with the intent of focus groups, individual comments were documented. The preparation of the summaries involved collaboration between members of each interview team, with a discussing and sharing of the format and word processing duties.

Opportunities for discussing the process were shared by team members on an informal basis at meal times, walks and throughout the process. Team members met in the conference room most mornings before the interviews began. The evening of day five, was a break from the intensity of the project, except for those members preparing a summary of Wednesday afternoon's interview. Sight seeing and walks were shared by some members of the team during the break.

Day Six

Themes.

The morning of day six, the project team met to discuss experiences and pull out key themes from the week's interviews. The intent, as with the questions for the focus groups and semi-structured interviews, was to focus on past, present and future. Taking into account the historical and cultural context in which a person operates was one of the underlying assumptions of the project, which was emphasized in the questions that were asked, and the responses from community members. Comments from respondents highlighted pride in their history, and concerns about the present which would affect their future. The team brainstormed as to the most appropriate way to capture the comments from the community. The team divided into four groups to develop information boards on flip chart paper. Each group took one of the themes; what was it like in the past, what is it like now, what do you see for the future if there is no change, and what do you want to see for the future. This process of collaboration took most of the morning, with the team members getting back together in the conference room just before lunch, and posting the information boards. Similarities of comments from different focus groups were apparent. For example, both the seniors and the young people commented on the community being "a good place to grow old".

Thursday afternoon was spent further refining the information. Flip charts were posted on one wall with the titles; what individuals think will likely happen to the community, what they would like to have happen; and what they think it would take to make it happen. Team members then slotted comments from the information boards onto each of the flip charts. An additional flip chart was added, with "Bright Ideas" generated by the project team. The interactions between team members as the process unfolded reflected the mutual accommodation and influence inherent in the human ecological framework. The intensity of the day and energy expended by the team left everyone weary at the end of the day. Some members chose to do some sightseeing together, others took a break from the group.

Day Seven

Developing the Presentation.

The major concern for the project team on day seven was how to present the information to the participants and the community at a brunch scheduled for the next morning, day eight. Much discussion was held regarding the merits of written reports versus flip charts versus pictures. Underlying the discussion was a commitment by the project team to give back to the community a summary of the responses, capturing responses from the semi-structured interviews as well as focus groups. Providing the community with the responses was seen as necessary to provide the catalyst for them to continue the process. This commitment to the community was also seen as important by Serrano-Garcia (1984) as she suggested research should be directed by a commitment to the participants.

The team divided into four groups, with the task of presenting to the community the past, present, and future. The group looking at the past was to focus on what it was like, the present focusing on what it is like now. The future was divided into two groups, with one group looking at what will happen in the next 10 years if there is no change, and another group looking at what the community would like to see happen in the future.

The creativity of the team members, as well as the mutual accommodation and mutual influence, rose to the fore as different ways of presenting the information were discussed. Upon listing comments, one group decided to develop a pictorial presentation of the future with sketches by team members. The idea caught on with all groups developing a pictorial representation of the findings for the community. The pictorial presentation of the past focused on what it was like then, with a listing of prides and regrets. The present focused on what shapes the community, and a listing of individual comments from the participants in the focus groups. The future presented two pictures and descriptors; what will happen in the next 10 years if there is no change, and their dream of what they would like to happen.

Work on the presentation continued into the late evening, with a break for a wiener roast and sing song. Some team members were reluctant to break until the task was completed, but with some convincing attended the group event. The break enabled team members to relax and play together before getting back to the conference room and completing the presentation. The completion of the presentation resulted in a use of the diverse talents of all members of the team, from the creative ideas and artistic talents to the organization of the presentation. The value placed on the potential of all individuals, and the belief that all individuals have competencies and are capable of learning and developing these competencies was an assumption that allowed team members to choose their particular role in developing the presentation. The ownership of the project by all team members was evident. As various groups finished their presentations, team members assisted other groups.

Day Eight

Presentation to the Community.

The initial feedback to the community took place at a brunch on the morning of day eight at the curling rink in the community. All participants in focus groups or semi-structured interviews were given two free tickets to attend the brunch. Additional tickets were sold for a small fee to community members.

The pictures and descriptors of the past, present and future were taped to the wall in the curling rink for viewing by the community. An additional page titled "What do you think?", along with a pen was beside each section to provide an additional opportunity for members of the community to respond. A feedback box provided an opportunity for a more confidential response.

The intent of the morning was to have brunch, a short presentation by team members and then a viewing of the presentation by the community. However, members of the community were immediately drawn to the presentation and spent time looking, discussing and commenting.

In response to the community's reaction, brunch was held back for a short time to provide an opportunity for community members to view the presentation. Their participation in the process at this point was seen as valuable and valid, and provided an opportunity to generate some excitement about the project. Toward the end of the brunch, a short presentation was made to the community, but it was difficult for much of the crowd to hear due to the cavernous ceilings and size of the curling rink. Members of the community were also given an opportunity to ask questions, and talk to members of the team during the presentation and throughout the brunch. The interest expressed by some community members made it difficult, at times, for team members to eat brunch.

Many positive comments were heard, with the most positive being the request by the community that the presentation be left with the community for ongoing display. A commitment was made to the community to provide a summary report of the project for their review and feedback in the fall.

Opportunities for Participation

A progress report on the Caragana Project was published in September 1992 in the monthly newspaper of the community (Appendix G). A draft report on the Caragana Project by a team member from Alberta Agriculture was circulated to the community members in October 1992 (Appendix H). This team member agreed to draft the report as community members were not comfortable with the task. Ideally the report would have been prepared by a community member with an ongoing commitment to and ownership of the project, as the preparation of the report could have been viewed as the building of a base of resources within the community with a move toward self-reliance. The building of a base of resources, and a move toward self-reliance was one of the underlying assumptions for the project. Alberta Agriculture, in their ongoing relationship with the community, and as part of their ongoing commitment and ownership of the project were the next most appropriate candidates for the drafting of the report.

The report contained a synopsis of the Caragana Project and asked community members to respond on a feedback page. Six responses to the initial draft were received. The request for feedback was based on assumptions of providing opportunities for participation and the need to be reflective in social action research. Revisions and feedback were incorporated and a final report was distributed in November 1992 (Appendix I).

The low number of responses received to the initial report were a concern. However, it is not clear whether this was due to a general acceptance of the report or a lack of interest. Community members were, however, given a number of opportunities to respond; at the brunch (in the suggestion box or on the flip chart), after the Progress Report in the Fort Express in September 1992 and after the initial draft of the report in October 1992.

IV. Results and Discussion

The data that were collected for the purposes of this thesis included sources of information that related to the process of the project such as: data collection techniques, meeting minutes, activities initiated and ongoing, and personal communication. These were analyzed by reviewing the question for the research and the purpose of the project as well as the assumptions. Results and discussion of the analysis are presented in this chapter. The method used for the project, social action research, is also discussed in relation to the project. The themes present in the summaries of the focus groups and semi-structured interviews are not included as they do not directly contribute to a discussion of the empowerment process as it was operationalized in the Caragana Project. The content and summaries of the interviews are, however, important to further research that may be undertaken focusing on the empowerment process in the human ecological framework. The underlying assumptions for the Caragana Project are critical to the discussion of the empowerment process. Therefore the assumptions are analyzed in this chapter to highlight how they were operationalized.

In reviewing the assumptions developed for the Caragana Project, and how they were operationalized, the overriding assumption that empowerment is a positive value must again be emphasized as it was the basis for the project. The assumptions are the underpinnings of the project and need to be considered in future studies that replicate the study of an empowerment process as used in the Caragana Project.

The assumptions were not articulated specifically to the project team or the community as a whole, but were referred to and operationalized throughout the process. In future projects of this nature, collaborating with team members to develop assumptions would likely provide an additional opportunity for empowerment, as well as clear articulation of the assumptions. However, this may not be possible if rapid rural appraisal is used in the initial stage because of time constraints. The underlying assumptions were used to develop the questions for both the focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

The first assumption, that all individuals have competencies, and are capable of learning and developing these competencies is played out in the Caragana Project. The actualizing of some of these competencies is evident in the belief that the community can take action to resolve their issues, and the process will continue. Were these competencies not present, the process would have faltered and died. The participation and collaboration of all project team members also emphasized this assumption. The process for empowerment in the community went beyond the individual, and took place through interactions with other individuals, with members of other communities, organizations within the community, schools, local governments and other environmental systems as evidenced by the cross-section of focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

The second assumption that the learning and development of individuals is a life long process is inherent within the process, but has not yet been fully actualized. The learning and development that has taken place forms the basis for subsequent learning and development so that the process continues. As discussed previously, a longitudinal view is necessary to understand the life long process. The current focus within the project on a process has not taken into account the long-term nature of the development of competencies. Future projects of this nature should consider a longitudinal approach with continued collaboration to determine the sustainability of the catalyst provided by the Caragana Project.

The third assumption that individuals cannot be studied in isolation, but within the context of living was addressed through the human ecological framework used for the Caragana Project. The cross-section of groups and individuals interviewed, and the ongoing process for the Caragana Project takes into account the individual in the context of living. Mutual influence and mutual accommodation was evident in the interactions among team members, and among focus group members throughout the data collection. The continued interest in developing the ecotourism industry implies interactions between individuals and their environment. Community members, in continuing the process will be balancing the project with responsibilities to families, themselves, and to other community members.

The fourth assumption that the historical and cultural context must be taken into account was evident in the questions, responses and the pictorial presentation of the Caragana project. The importance of the history of the community was a common theme in data collection in the focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The history of the community appeared to play an important part in people's lives and their view of the community. Many community members expressed regrets as well as pride in the history of the community. The regrets focused on loss of opportunities for growth. Capturing this history, and what had gone on before was taken into account so that the future process can build on the prides and minimize regrets.

The fifth assumption focuses on a collaborative relationship. Sharing of values, goals, attitudes and beliefs is intended to create this collaborative relationship. The belief in the mutually beneficial nature of the project was articulated during the first meeting of the team.

The process of mutual accommodation and mutual influence took place between and among members of the project team throughout the process. Although goals, values, attitudes and beliefs were not explicitly shared, the collaborative nature, and the negotiations that took place among team members operationalized them. Collaboration with all project team members on each step of the process allowed relationships among team members to build, with opportunities for mutual influence and mutual accommodation. The validity of each member's background and experience was emphasized, along with the opportunity to learn from each other. Although the Australian team members, having more experience with the process often took the lead, the activities that took place throughout the project provided opportunities for all team members to participate. To assist in the sharing of values, attitudes and beliefs it is recommended that future projects include the development of assumptions with the project team.

The sixth assumption, that settings with opportunities for participation are more likely to be empowering, was also played out in the collaborative nature of the project and the view of the week as only an initial step. Members of the community participated on the project team as well as the identification of issues in the focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Opportunities for feedback invited ongoing participation of community members. Members have participated in ongoing activities related to the project.

The seventh assumption states that solutions developed internally are more likely to be empowering. This assumption addressed one of the drawbacks of the project voiced by a community member, the lack of the development of a specific action plan by the project team. It is the researcher's belief that the development of an action plan by the project team would have been presumptuous as well as disempowering for the community. Clearly the development of a plan by the community is more likely to be empowering than an action plan imposed by the project team. The catalyst for identification of the issues, and some possibilities for future action was seen as empowering, so that community members can then determine future action. The development of an action plan by the project team would have been a drawback.

The eighth assumption, that empowerment tends to build a base of resources that allows individuals, organizations and communities to become increasingly self-reliant was evident in the Caragana Project. Although project team members from the University and Alberta Agriculture were invited to the first follow-up meetings, subsequent meetings were organized and attended by community members only. This suggests a base of resources was built within the community, with the community becoming more self-reliant.

The problem addressed in this research was: does assisting community members in identification of issues enable them to become empowered so they continue the process of resolving their issues?

The answer to the question, one year after the data collection, is yes. The Caragana Project provided a catalyst for the community to mobilize and continue the process based on the issues that were identified with the project team in July 1992. The pictorial presentation to the community provided a unique opportunity for the mirroring of issues identified through focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The focus groups and interviews included a cross-section of community members and provided perspectives from seniors, school administrators and teachers, young people, parents, business/entrepreneurs, established farmers, young farmers, holistic management resource group members, non-agricultural/acreage owners, forestry, community and recreation group members, and local government representatives. Not surprising, was the identification of the same issues across groups. Common issues were concerns about lack of employment in the community, loss of environmental treasures and fear that the community would die if nothing changed. The pictorial representation of dreams for a healthy community provided food for thought, and a catalyst for community members to view the community differently, and see the need for action to preserve the life of the community.

The identification of a need for action or change to preserve the life of the community suggests that critical reflection, necessary to the empowerment process had occurred (Freire, 1970 and Kieffer, 1984). The focus groups provided an opportunity for members of the community to interact and connect in a way they had not done prior to the project. Talking with each other in this venue connected people in new ways, and gave the project team insight into the community. The focus groups, as well as the community brunch seemed to be social events for the community and as such brought members together to interact.

Following the initial eight day phase of the Caragana Project in July 1992 the project has continued in the community. Meetings have been organized by community members and held in the community in December 1992, January 1993, and they are continuing on an ongoing basis. Representatives from Alberta Agriculture and the University of Alberta attended the first two meetings. The outcome of the December meeting was the organization of a tourism workshop scheduled for the spring of 1993. Many community members were busy in the spring and summer months and the tourism project has been on hold. There was an excellent turnout and enthusiasm was expressed by those attending the workshop (F. Bradley, personal communication, June 27, 1993). The intent of the workshop is to bring in an expert on tourism to explore ways of developing the tourism potential of community and the surrounding area.

Although representatives from Alberta Agriculture and the University of Alberta also attended the January meeting (Caragana Steering Committee, Minutes, Appendix J), leadership was clearly in the hands of community members. Three community members who had been part of the project team, and one additional member from the community were present. The purpose of this meeting was to establish a steering committee and plan for further action based on a summary of issues identified in the initial phase of the Caragana Project, and to focus on short term as well as long terms plans. Additional members of the community were to be recruited for specific projects by the steering committee. Ways of obtaining further feedback from the community were also discussed. The involvement of community members was identified as necessary for the resolution of issues. Possibilities that were suggested included newspaper articles inviting written feedback as well as the opportunity for verbal feedback through the use of an answering machine attached to the phone number for the Agriculture Society.

Three of the community members present agreed to be part of the steering committee, with one additional member agreeing to participate in specific projects. One of the community members was on the school board, and it was agreed that a member of the Improvement District council be asked to sit on the steering committee. Additional names were generated, and agreement was reached to recruit a total of six members for the steering committee. The possibility of specialists being invited for specific topics or meetings was also agreed upon as a possible option. In recruiting further membership, a one year commitment was to be requested. A great deal of enthusiasm was expressed about the positive assets of the community, and the need for raising the community's awareness of these assets. Several of the issues evolving from the Caragana Project were discussed, with ideas for resolution.

Several meetings have taken place since the January meeting (F. Bradley, personal communication, June 27, 1993), again with the community taking the lead, and ownership of the project. This is obvious when representatives from the University of Alberta and Alberta Agriculture were not involved in subsequent meetings. The ownership of the Caragana project began with a university and government base, with a shift to ownership by the project team, and finally a shift to ownership by the community.

Short term and long-term projects have resulted from the initial identification of issues in the Caragana Project (F. Bradley, personal communication, June 27, 1993). These range from applications to the provincial government for a project to preserve the sand hills to a change in school library hours to accommodate community members.

The community is utilizing resources and potential that exists within the community to continue the process of resolving their issues. At this time it appears to be an ongoing process. In contrast, Wright (1992) found that after an initial intervention, the community did not sustain the impetus to initiate change. Although Wright worked closely with the community in obtaining their opinions, community members were not involved in the process of resolving the issue. Their lack of involvement may have resulted in a lack of empowerment and a continued reliance on an "expert" to resolve issues. By involving the community members in the process of the Caragana Project, potential within the community was developed and became a resource which may help to sustain the impetus of the Caragana Project. In order to determine the sustainability in the community of the catalyst provided by the Caragana Project, longitudinal research of the project is necessary.

After answering the one major research question in analyzing the results for this thesis, one must also ask whether the Caragana Project was necessary. Would community members have mobilized to identify and begin the process of resolving their issues without the catalyst provided by the Caragana Project? The question is difficult to answer. There is little evidence to support the fact that communities spontaneously organize to resolve issues (Craig et al, 1990). It is the researcher's belief that the Caragana Project provided the catalyst for community members to mobilize and take action. The possibility for a community to organize and dedicate a week long time period to identification of issues may not be realistic given the demands of family life, individual careers, and time and economic constraints. The initial stage of identification of issues through the Caragana Project seems to have provided the impetus for the next step. This next step was the development of a steering committee to continue resolving issues by utilizing the considerable energy and potential of community members. The learning and development that takes place through the identification and resolution of issues and continuation of the process suggests the actualization of potential that exists within individuals and the community. The actualizing of this potential enables individuals as well as the community to become empowered.

The method used for the Caragana Project, social action research, was instrumental and necessary to achieve the objective of the project. The spiral of steps, and the planning, acting, and observing and evaluating the result of each action allowed the process to evolve in a way that was responsive to both the project team members as well as the community's needs. The rearranging of schedules, once a concern was expressed by a community member regarding the lack of participation of an Australian in one of the focus groups, was responsive to a community concern. This response provided recognition of the importance of the participation of the Australian team members in the eyes of the community. This recognition led to a total rearranging of schedules. The draw of the Australians as outsiders or celebrities had not been previously recognized.

The emphasis on group decision, commitment to improvement, and collaboration were necessary for the project to succeed, particularly given the emphasis on rapid rural appraisal. The condensed time frame for this project was dictated by time and financial constraints as well as successes the Australians had achieved in similar projects. Although the rapid part of the project was largely based on pragmatic reasons, it is the researcher's belief that it contributed to achieving the objective of the project. The catalyst provided by intense involvement, and high energy level of team members could likely not be sustained over a longer period of time. The participation by community members could also be given intensely for a short period of time, to provide a catalyst, but is also not likely to be sustained over the long term. The use of social action research methods, with an emphasis on group decision, commitment to improvement and collaboration coupled with the condensed time frame in rapid rural appraisal all assisted in achieving the objective of the project.

Empowerment as it has been discussed in the Caragana Project is seen as more than just a concept or an idea. It is the researcher's contention that empowerment is much broader, and encompasses a particular philosophy. This philosophy encompasses the belief about the potential within individuals, the role of the researcher in developing this potential and the role of the individual. The respect for and belief in an individual's potential is played out in this view of empowerment as a process. A project such as the Caragana Project may not be possible for someone who does not hold this view. The focus on collaboration and actualizing of individual potential will likely be difficult for a researcher whose basic premise focuses on the expert role. Rappaport's (1987) case for a theory of the ecology of empowerment invites further study and research. Only by linking the theory, research and practise in a congruent manner can a theory of empowerment be more fully developed and analyzed.

The belief that empowerment is a positive value needs to be explored through further research to understand all of the variables affecting the empowerment process. The links between empowerment as a process and the human ecological framework, need to be clearly articulated in further research. As discussed earlier, it is impossible to study the individual in isolation in a community development project. The impact of empowerment on the individual, not addressed in this study invites further study. Although this process was seen to be empowering by the researcher, the individual community members involved in the process may provide a different perspective. The links between empowerment and social action research also need to be studied further. The very nature of social action research and the emphasis on collaboration suggests empowerment as an underlying theme as it has been defined for the Caragana Project. However, the word empowerment was not used in the social action research literature. Additional research needs to take a longitudinal approach to the empowerment process to determine the sustainability of a catalyst, and to determine whether outcomes achieved lead to a continuation of the process.

It is the researcher's belief that the Caragana Project can be used as a framework for others who are interested in providing a catalyst for communities to enable them to become empowered. The continuation of the process, and the ownership of the project by the community suggest that the empowerment process used in the Caragana Project provided an opportunity for individuals in the community to become empowered. The project showed that enabling individuals to become empowered and work together to resolve issues enables the community to become empowered as well.

In retrospect, the task at hand was formidable. To build a team with twelve people from diverse backgrounds who had never worked together, conduct and summarize interviews, and provide a presentation to the community within the space of eight days seems unrealistic. However, the strong commitment from all team members made the project possible. Although the team as a whole does not have an ongoing relationship with the Caragana Project, acting as a catalyst for the project and developing potential within the community does speak to a longitudinal view. The community members involved in the project remain within and committed to the community.

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Appendix A

Proposed Schedule for the Project

(N. Keating, personal communication March 2, 1992)

(2 weeks)

Day 1 & 2	Meet with team to develop flow chart of questions/information for each pair of team members to use in the interviews. Flow chart includes things to remember during interviews, ground rules, general questions to ask each group, specific questions. Pairing of team members, and the selection of interviews for each pair will take place on the first day. The focus will be on team building.
Day 3	Each pair conducts a focus group interview in the morning. Review of the tape, and summary of the interview takes place in the afternoon.
Day 4	Pairs get together to compare notes on first round of interviews.
Day 5	Second round of focus group interviews, and review semi-structured interviews.
Day 6	Total group analysis of data collection.

Appendix B

Telephone Screening Script

Caragana Project - Community Meetings/Interviews

(names have been substituted with blanks)

Hello, this is _________ and I live _________. I'm involved in a special project in the community. We're contacting people who we think would have some good ideas about issues that concern our families and neighbours. Your name was suggested as a person who could represent the interest of __________ (focus group category).

Do you have three minutes to talk, right now? (If YES, continue.)

We are asking selected individuals/groups of people to join us for a discussion about both the short-comings and the positive points about living in this community. The idea is to talk to as many people as possible for feedback that will be used to develop a plan of action to strengthen our community.

This is part of something we call the "Caragana Project: Quest for a Healthy Community". The research team working on this project includes home economists from Alberta Agriculture, a Family Studies professor and students from the University of Alberta, three faculty members from the University of Western Sydney, Australia, and six community members. You probably know one or more of us. (List names if asked.)

We plan to hold a meeting at _________ on July ___ starting at _____ p.m. It will last about two hours. Refreshments will be served.

Your input is valuable. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your perceptions about the future of this community. Would you be willing to share your ideas with us at that meeting?

( ) No (If no, thank you for your time.)

( ) Yes Name: ____(Write below)____.

We will be contacting you closer to the meeting date to confirm your attendance. If you need any help with travelling to the meeting or if you need to cancel, please call me __________ at __________ or __________, District Home Economist at __phone__ or __________, project coordinator at __________. Both __________ and __________ work with Alberta Agriculture in Barrhead.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Name	Phone #	Group Individual	Attend Meeting/Interview YES____ or NO____

Appendix C

Revised Schedule - Caragana Project

Days One and Two	Team Building. Orientation to the project, development of flow chart of topics/questions for interviews. Refine project and interview schedule, define roles, pair team members and select interviews. Discuss guidelines for interviews and present demonstration focus group.
Days Three, Four and Five	Focus groups or semi-structured interviews scheduled, morning, afternoon and evening. Review of tape and summary of interview takes place in time block following the interview.
Day Six	Team to meet as a group to pull out key themes from all interviews.
Day Seven	Team meets to develop presentation for the community based on themes from the interviews.
Day Eight	Community Brunch and Presentation.

Appendix D

Guidelines for Focus Groups

Team members should facilitate only one interview a day. Interviewing takes a lot of energy.

Members of the team not scheduled at an interview may be observers. The exception is semi-structured interviews, where an observer might be overwhelming or intrusive.

Permission to tape must be requested of each participant in each focus group, or semi-structured interview so that interviews can be taped.

After some initial discomfort, people usually forget the tape is running after 20 minutes.

When permission is denied, the tape must be turned off.

Sit beside people who may dominate; if they sit across from you, they will continually make eye contact and engage you.

Encourage people to talk.

Finish the interview in approximately 90 minutes.

Start with safe or broad questions and conclude with recapping what you have heard.

Ask if there are any additional comments, and record on tape if permission has been given.

At the conclusion of the interview, reiterate the team's commitment to a presentation at the brunch on Saturday and a summary report in the fall.

The group, including the facilitator is seated in a circle, with the recorder and observer off to one side.

```
        Facilitator
     X      X
  X            X
     X      X
        X         Recorder
```

Ensure the room is organized for each interview. Ensure there are chairs, tape recorders, microphones, tapes, booklets to use for recording, folders and a back-up tape.

Use participant's first names only when recording. When recording, do a diagram of the seating of the group first.

Record only on the right hand side of the page so the left side can be used for observations during the summary of the interview.

The summary of the interview takes place in the following block of time. For example afternoon interviews will be summarized in the evening.

Appendix E
Focus Group and Semi-Structured Interview Responsibilities

(initials have been changed)

	Facilitator	Recorder	Observer
Monday, 10:00 a.m. Group 1 - Seniors Drop-In Centre	G.D.	B.B	L.L.G.
Group 2 - School School Staff Room	W.W.	J.J.	K.L.
Group 5 - Bus./Entre. Esso Conference Room	S.B.	B.C.	Y.O.
Monday, 9:30 p.m. Group 4 - Parents Recreation Hall	K.L.	J.A.	
Group 7 - Non-Ag/Acre. Drop-In Centre	Y.O.	F.S.	
Group 3 - Young People School staff Room	L.L.G.	M.K.	
Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. 14 SSI - D. I.D. Office	W.W.	B.C.	------
8a SSI - K. Forestry Office	S.B.	B.B.	------
14 SSI - W.T.	J.A.	G.D.	
Tuesday, 7:30 p.m. Groups 9 & 12 - Commun. Grps & Rec. Recreation Hall	W.W.	M.K.	F.S.
Group 6b - Young Farm. B. (private home)	B.B.	J.J.	B.C.
14 SSI - G.A. Private home	S.B.	J.A.	------
Group 11 - New Arrivals Drop-In Centre	G.D.	Y.O.	
Wednesday, 10:00 a.m. Group 6a - Est. Farmers	J.A.	B.C.	G.D.
Group 13 - Local Gov. ID Office	L.L.G.	F.S.	W.W.
Group 6c - HRM Recreation Hall	S.B.	K.L.	J.J.
14 SSI - A.T. Private home	B.B.	Y.O.	
Wednesday, 3:00 p.m. 14 SSI - Comm. Health Sturgeon Health Unit, Swan Hills	Y.O.	G.D.	

Appendix F

Focus Group Topics/Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Individual

Can you tell me your name, where you live, how long you've lived here, and what you consider to be your community?

What can you tell me, a stranger, about your community?

Tell me what has been happening in your community over the past 5-10 years?

OR Give us a picture of what it was like to live here 5-10 years ago. What is the picture now? Is it different?

Tell me what it is like to be ______ in this community.

Is this a good place to ______ (live, work, play, grow up, farm)?

What is it like to be ______ here?

Significance of the Place to Them

What brought you here?

What keeps you here?

If you were going to move to another community what would draw you to that community?

Of the things you have listed, what does this community offer or not offer?

What do you do outside this community?

What do you do that involves other people in your community?

What do you do with your family/friends?

What are your concerns about living in this community?

What kind of support do you need to thrive in this community?

If you look 5-10 years down the road, what do you see in regard to these concerns?

Would you like to see anything different in 5-10 years, than you think will happen?

What could be done to make these things happen?

What do you see as the strengths and weakness of you community?

How do we get to know what everyone in the community wants?

How do things get done in this community?

How do you help change attitudes in this community?

What would you like to tell us that has not been talked about?

What would you like to be part of? to do?

Closure

Today is the first step, to listen to you, the community.

The next step is to share back what we have heard.

(Listen for further ideas on action we can take.)

Thank you for sharing with us your time, experiences and ideas.

Another step - what ideas do you have for taking action, for you or your group?

Appendix G

Caragana Project: Progress Report

Community Newspaper, October, 1992

(names have been substituted with blanks)

The Caragana Project was launched during a week long period in July. Many local area residents were invited to participate in numerous discussions about their community. With the first stage of the Caragana Project behind us, we can now begin to concentrate on taking what we learned during this initial phase and using it to focus the community towards new developments. What makes the area a good place to live? What do you see as the key characteristics of the area? What is the future of the community? If you could have anything for the area, what would it be?

Many of you met the Caragana Project research team in July. The team was made up of community members, __________, __________, and __________; Alberta Agriculture reps, __________, __________, and __________; and University of Alberta students, __________, __________, and __________. The key researchers were from the University of Western Sydney in Australia, Dennis Gamble, Lesley White and Stephen Blunden. We were enthused to see such a broad and diverse range of opinions about the area. We were also pleased with the number of people who took the time out of their busy schedule to talk with us. We know that there are still a number of people with opinions that we didn't talk to. That's where the second stage of the project comes in.

We will be circulating a draft of the trends and patterns you identified for us during the research stage. This draft will provide all community members a chance to respond to the research team's perception of what you said. Look for this document in your mailbox by the end of October. A question sheet will ask for your opinions. Remember this is your chance to speak out.

Throughout the winter season, the community will develop an action plan. An action plan outlines the steps a community can take both in the long and short term to enhance their community. All ideas both big and small will be incorporated. The focus is on those things we can do, and for which we have control over. We were enthused by the number of creative ideas shared with us during July and know that there are many more where those came from.

To recap what happened in July, it is important to remember that community members were selected at random. We initially developed a set of questions to assist the meeting group leaders in guiding their discussion. We had 12 focus group meetings and 8 personal interviews during the week. All the data was collected and written reports were prepared. After looking at the past, present and future of the area trends or patterns were identified. The research team presented initial findings to the community at a brunch held at the end of the week. A pictorial view of the trends were presented. Over one hundred people attended the brunch and discussed the findings.

Excitement and growing momentum could be felt at the hall at the community brunch on July 18. We hope to capitalize on that momentum and have the community continue on. Many people in the area have a great sense of hope for the future. ___________ said it best when he said "Let's not lose this impetus, this is exciting!!"

When you receive your community draft report in the mail, discuss the findings with your friends and neighbours. It's sure to be a great conversation starter. Keep a paper handy to write down all your ideas, both big and small. After all, from small beginnings, great things can grow.

If you are interested in more information about this project, be sure to contact your community members on the research team! _________ and _________. You may also contact the Alberta Agriculture representatives, District Home Economist at _________, or _________, Project Coordinator at _________.

Appendix H

Caragana Project - Community Reaction Report

(draft, distributed to Canadian project team members, October, 1992)

Introduction

The Caragana Project is an ongoing process to assist the community in addressing their future goals and needs. A group of community members with help from Alberta Agriculture, the University of Western Sydney and the University of Alberta conducted the first phase in this ongoing process. During this first phase, several community members were approached and asked to share their thoughts, attitudes and dreams about living in this community. This report is designed to allow ALL community members to share their ideas with others. Use this report, not as one written in stone but one which encourages everyone in the community to discuss their future.

A number of different discussion groups and individual interviews were organized to provide the research team with a wide range of opinions, thoughts and suggestions. Some individual interviews were also conducted to provide a method of asking for an individual perspective. All of this information was recorded on tape, as well written reports were prepared following each discussion group/interview.

The research team reviewed a huge amount of information in an effort to identify trends, issues and common dreams about the area. These trends, were shared with community members at a brunch in the community on July 18, 1992. Quotes and drawings were used to capture the main points/messages. Everyone was encouraged to respond to the quotes and pictures that were presented.

A written summary of the findings follow in this report. Remember, that this report does not contain the answers. It does, however, provide the information for communication among various interest groups within the area. The research team has attempted to reflect back to the community the information they collected. If this reflection is inaccurate in your opinion, there is an opportunity for you to respond on the back page of this report. It's up to you.

What was Asked during the Discussion Groups

The following is a example of the types of questions which were asked during July.

1) What can you tell me, a stranger, about your community?
2) Tell me what has been happening in your community over the past 5-10 years.
3) What brought you here? What keeps you here?
4) If you were going to move to another community, what would draw you to that community?
5) What do you do outside this community?
6) What are your concerns about living in this community?
7) If you look 5-10 years down the road, what do you see in regard to these concerns?
8) Would you like to see anything different in 5-10 years, than you think will happen?
9) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of your community?

Reflections of the Past

Without exception, all discussion groups and individuals mentioned the history of the area. Pride in the historical significance of the area was the common theme. It is the second oldest fort in Alberta and many people were aware of its significance during the fur trade. The settlers also played a large role in shaping the area. Most residents are familiar enough with the local history that they could provide their own stories, anecdotes about how and why people chose to settle in this area initially.

The Athabasca River was identified as playing a part in the history of the area. The river was used to establish a livelihood for many of the original settlers. The river was used as a way of transporting goods (furs, lumber, game) to other points.

The forestry industry in the area was seen as a vital part of the community both in the past and in the present. Logging and saw mills provided early settlers with an opportunity to supplement their farming operation during the winter months. Small family owned sawmills helped to establish a balance to the local economy. Trapping was also a common way to supplement family income.

Many groups identified a sense of nostalgia about the past. Activities "we used to do" were often mentioned. Many of these activities were not of the organized variety but ones which occurred on the spur of the moment. Newcomers to the area were invited to community suppers which included family games, etc. "We used to visit and work together more." "We built community buildings together." "We don't seem to do that anymore."

The notion that a few local residents came to this area to hide from something was expressed. Examples included people who came to this area to "escape the draft" or "avoid the law". It was mentioned that this belief perpetuates a negative image about the area.

Several people talked about opportunities for economic development missed in the past. Examples include the loss of the Judy Creek area, development of Swan Hills instead of expanding the community and not becoming a major fur trading post like Edmonton. There was a sense of grief over these missed opportunities.

In summary, the most common sentiment expressed by the community was a sense of pride in their local history. Several identified history as one of the community's strengths, something that could be built upon.

Reflections of the Present

All discussion groups/individuals mentioned the exceptional scenery in the area. Some mentioned this as being the main reason why they chose to live in the area. Concern over preserving this scenery and the wilderness area was expressed by several individuals. Reasons for this concern ranged from lack of control over local areas (i.e., the sand hills) and the trade-off between economic development and preserving the environment.

Many groups discussed the potential of the Sandhills area to become an outstanding tourist attraction. Most felt a sense of powerlessness over the development of the area because of its Crown Land status. Many were worried about outsiders coming in and destroying the area through abuse or fire.

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Several commented on the loss of businesses over the past few years. Some see this as a continuing trend. Most individuals said that they spent a lot of time on the road in order to access necessary goods and services.

All discussion groups had an interest in the school. The school is seen as the centre of the community. These opinions were expressed by everyone whether or not they had children or grandchildren going to the community school. Parents who chose for varying reasons to send their children to other schools still felt that the community school was a vital part of the community. Many would like to know more about the activities of the school. Centralization of the school to Barrhead was of concern to many. It is felt that some children could be provided a better education in a smaller school. Bussing children past the community to school was seen as a threat to the local school. Issues relating to the school were complex. Many opinions and disagreements were expressed.

The need to provide opportunities for young people to stay and work in the community was expressed. Difficulty for younger people to enter farming was of concern to all generations of farming families. Established farmers wished for better times to reduce the necessity of off-farm employment. Younger farmers wished they had more time for family and community activities. Uncertainty of the available off-farm employment was of concern to many.

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Prospects for the Future

Two questions were asked of discussion groups about the future of the community and area.

1) How do you see the community and area in the future if everything continues the same?
2) If you could have or do anything, what would you like to see happen for the area in the future?

The responses to these two questions were vastly different. This may be related to the perceptions people have of their ability to control their future. When asked how things likely will be, the responses were largely negative. There was a feeling of powerlessness and lack of hope about individuals' ability to change the future. Examples of what will likely happen included continued loss of businesses from the area, potential for reduced school services, concern over privatization of postal services and an increased need for citizens to travel outside the community for goods and services.

Another concern is the sustainability of local traditional industries such as farming and logging. Low periods in the agriculture cycle combined with increased foreign ownership of the forestry industry leaned the view towards a bleak future. If these local economies do not begin to turn around, there will need to be continued diversification of farm operations and development of other means of livelihood.

Uncertainty of the change from an Improvement District to Rural District or Municipal District captured two points of view. One concentrated on the ability of the area to negotiate for increased services and manage their own tax base. People holding this view felt they could control future growth and encourage local development. Those with the second view were concerned with the distribution of tax dollars within I.D. 15. They wondered whether the community would be able to compete with a more highly industrialized Whitecourt area. A lack of information about the consequences of this move was evident as no one group was able to clearly spell out the implications.

Many commended on the continuation of their status as a "small fish in a big pond". The feeling was that they were unable to compete for government services nor affect government policy because of their size. Most were resigned to the fact that they had little power to change this situation. They believed their efforts were better channelled to those ares over which they have control.

A Dream for the Community and Area

An exciting part of the project for the research members was the collection of a variety of ideas for the future of the community and area. While many had an attitude of resignation, a number of positive options for the future were shared with the research team. These dreams and ideas presented by local community members are summarized as follows:

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- School should be the focal point of the community.
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    - swimming pool, ice skating rink, skateboard park.
- Invite local businesses and non-agricultural people to be included in the I.D. tour.

These ideas were collected during the first phase of the project. We would like to hear more from their community members. Use this list to discuss with your friends and neighbours the feasibility of these activities and add to the list any ideas you have.

YOUR CHANCE TO RESPOND

1) What ideas or issues would you like to discuss in more detail with other community members?

2) What additional ideas would you like to share?

3) Other comments?

If you would like to be contacted regarding ongoing discussions about the future of the area, please include your name and phone number.

Name______________________________________ Phone__________________

Please return your response to: Caragana Project
c/o Community Agriculture Society

or drop-off at: _________.

It's now up to you to be involved! Thank you!

Appendix I

(distributed to community members November, 1992)

Caragana Project: Quest for a Healthy Community

Community Report

Community Agricultural Society

CARAGANA PROJECT - COMMUNITY REACTION REPORT

Introduction

The Caragana Project is an ongoing process to assist the community and area in addressing their future goals and needs. A group of community members, with help from Alberta Agriculture, the University of Western Sydney and the University of Alberta, conducted the first phase in this ongoing process. During this first phase, several community members were approached and asked to share their thoughts, attitudes and dreams about living in this community. This report is designed to allow ALL community members to share their ideas with others. Use this report, not as one written in stone but one which encourages everyone in the community to discuss their future.

A number of different discussion groups and individual interviews were organized to provide the research team with a wide range of opinions, thoughts and suggestions. Some individual interviews were also conducted to provide a method of asking for an individual perspective. This information was all recorded on tape plus written reports were prepared following each discussion group/interview.

The research team reviewed a huge amount of information in an effort to identify trends, issues and common dreams about the community and area. These trends were shared with community members at a brunch on July 18, 1992. Quotes and drawings were used to capture the main points/messages. Everyone was encouraged to respond to the quotes and pictures that were presented.

A written summary of the findings follow in this report. Remember, that this report does not continue the answers. It does, however, provide the information for communication among various interest groups within the area. The research team has attempted to reflect back to the community the information they collected. If this reflection is inaccurate in your opinion, there is an opportunity for you to respond on the back page of this report. It's up to you.

What was Asked during the Discussion Groups

The following is a example of the types of questions which were asked during July.

1) What can you tell me, a stranger, about your community?
2) Tell me what has been happening in your community over the past 5-10 years.
3) What brought you here? What keeps you here?
4) If you were going to move to another community, what would draw you to that community?
5) What do you do outside this community?
6) What are your concerns about living in this community?
7) If you look 5-10 years down the road, what do you see in regard to these concerns?
8) Would you like to see anything different in 5-10 years, than you think will happen?
9) What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of your community?

Reflections of the Past

Without exception, all discussion groups and individuals mentioned the history of the area. Pride in the historical significance of the area was the common theme. It is the second oldest fort in Alberta and many people were aware of its significance during the fur trade. The settlers also played a large role in shaping the area. Most residents are familiar enough with the local history that they could provide their own stories, anecdotes about how and why people chose to settle in this area initially.

The Athabasca River was identified as playing a part in the history of the area. The river was used to establish a livelihood for many of the original settlers. The river was used as a way of transporting goods (furs, lumber, game) to other points.

The forestry industry in the area was seen as a vital part of the community both in the past and in the present. Logging and saw mills provided early settlers with an opportunity to supplement their farming operation during the winter months. Small family owned sawmills helped to establish a balance to the local economy. Trapping was also a common way to supplement family income.

Many groups identified a sense of nostalgia about the past. Activities "we used to do" were often mentioned. Many of these activities were not of the organized variety but ones which occurred on the spur of the moment. Newcomers to the area were invited to community suppers which included family games, etc. "We used to visit and work together more." "We built community buildings together." "We don't seem to do that anymore."

The notion that a few local residents came to this area to hide from something was expressed. Examples included people who came to this area to "escape the draft" or "avoid the law". It was mentioned that this belief perpetuates a negative image about the area.

Several people talked about opportunities for economic development missed in the past. Examples include the loss of the Judy Creek area, development of Swan Hills instead of expanding the community, and not becoming a major fur trading post like Edmonton. There was a sense of grief over these missed opportunities.

In summary, the most common sentiment expressed by the community was a sense of pride in their local history. Several identified history as one of the community's strengths, something that could be built upon.

Reflections of the Present

All discussion groups/individuals mentioned the exceptional scenery in the area. Some mentioned this as being the main reason why they chose to live in the area. Concern over preserving this scenery and the wilderness area was expressed by several individuals. Reasons for this concern ranged from lack of control over local areas (i.e., the sand hills) and the trade-off between economic development and preserving the environment.

Many groups discussed the potential of the Sandhills area to become an outstanding tourist attraction. Most felt a sense of powerlessness over the development of the area because of its Crown Land status. Many were worried about outsiders coming in and destroying the area through abuse or fire.

Related to this discussion was the topic of forestry in the area. Many commented on the positive aspects of this development like supplying jobs for local farmers and bringing business to the area through related service industries. There was little consensus over the foreign ownership of sawmills. Some saw it as a way to increase capital in the area. Others viewed foreign owners as "outsiders" with little interest or commitment to the community. Many individuals were concerned about the sustainability of the industry and questioned the effectiveness of reforestation. Both positive and negative aspects of clear cut logging were mentioned.

Concern for economic development in the area focused on the lack of opportunities for young people. Opinions were divided as to whether or not new industry to the community would alter existing lifestyles. While most could foresee positive economic benefits to an expanded industrial base in the area, many were concerned about a large influx of people One person summed it up by saying "I want a lot of people to move here .. but then again I don't".

Several commented on the loss of businesses over the past few years. Some see this as a continuing trend. Most individuals said that they spent a lot of time on the road in order to access necessary goods and services.

All discussion groups had an interest in the school. The school is seen as the centre of the community. These opinions were expressed by everyone whether or not they had children or grandchildren going to the community school. Parents who chose for varying reasons to send their children to other schools still felt that the community school was a vital part of the community. Many would like to know more about the activities of the school. Centralization of the school to Barrhead was of concern to many. It is felt that some children could be provided a better education in a smaller school. Bussing children past the community to school was seen as a threat to the local school. Issues relating to the school were complex. Many opinions and disagreements were expressed.

The need to provide opportunities for young people to stay and work in the community was expressed. Difficulty for younger people to enter farming was of concern to all generations of farming families. Established farmers wished for better times to reduce the necessity of off-farm employment. Younger farmers wished they had more time for family and community activities. Uncertainty of the available off-farm employment was of concern to many.

Most of the people surveyed felt a part of the community and area. When asked what they would look for in another community if they had to move, many stated they wouldn't want to live anywhere else, or they would look for the same kind of community. While many had lived here all of their lives, some had chosen the community for its special attributes. These included a friendly atmosphere, family members present, beautiful scenery, and a great place to raise children.

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Name____ Phone____________________

Please return your response by **November 23, 1992** to:

Caragana Project
Community Agriculture Society

or drop-off at: __________.

It's now up to you to be involved! It's time to make a commitment to the future of your community. You are the agents of positive change!

Appendix J

Caragana Steering Committee

Minutes

MEETING: January 8, 1993, at _________.

PRESENT: Four community members, two representatives from Alberta Agriculture, one from University of Alberta.

The following is a summary of some of the ideas discussed.

CONCEPT

The Steering Committee will take the data gathered during the Caragana Project and look for recurring themes and important recommendations. We will initiate action on several of the areas most important to a healthy community. These may take the form of workshops, stakeholder meetings, directing concerns to significant groups or individuals, etc. Ten or twelve areas would be targeted for the year. Hopefully, once there has been an initiating action, the interest will be sufficient that others will carry the ball from there. The focus of the Steering Committee will have to be broad, to recognize the importance of the many aspects that are of concern to and vital to our community. Members of the Committee will bring their expertise on the community, and will draw on their acquaintances in the community to act as resource people for special topics. The committee will be a committee of the Ag Society, accessing funding through, and accountable to them.

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

Members of the committee will read through the summary reports and look for recurring themes, issues that need to be "actioned", and assets of the community. "Short term" actions that involve contacting someone or making a certain recommendation will be separated from "long term" actions that will require organizing a meeting or workshop.

RE-EVALUATING THE SUMMARIES

The summaries will be reviewed by members of the steering committee. One suggestion was that they be presented to a stakeholder group to see if they reflect the attitudes and concerns of the community accurately. Another suggestion was to gather information on the themes found in the summaries and present them in an article in the newspaper, asking for feedback. These responses could come in the form of written comments to specific questions, or phone calls to either a person or an answering machine. The possibility of putting in a phone line and answering machine at the Rec. Hall or the old Village Office was considered. These articles could be the prelude to some "Action Initiative" by the Steering Committee.

MEMBERSHIP

__________, __________, and __________ agreed to be part of the committee. __________ offered to help when she was needed as non-member. It was suggested that the I.D. Council be asked to have a member, or that one of them volunteer to sit on the board. Other names suggested were __________, __________, __________, __________, and __________. __________agreed to contact __________ about an I.D.

representative. _________ will talk to _________, and _________ will contact _________. Four to six members was considered to be an ideal number, with the possibility of inviting "specialists" to meetings dealing with special topics. It is important that members are aware that this is a one year commitment, and that their responsibility is to initiate action plans on the Caragana Project Summaries. A large aspect of being a member of the Steering Committee will be raising the community's level of awareness of the positive assets of the community and the potential for a positive future, if we toward it.

ISSUES

Some issues were tentatively suggested, and included:

TOURISM - _________ reported on the Tourism Workshop being organized for March or April. This could possibly lead to seminars on other more specific topics related to tourism.

COMMUNITY BUILDING - How we feel about ourselves and our community, our awareness of and identification with the community, communication, relationships, self esteem, appreciation, involvement, positive attitudes. _________ suggested _________ or _________ as resource people in this area. _________ mentioned the course he had taken with _________.

VOLUNTEERISM - _________ offered to send some material relating to this topis for our consideration.

SCHOOL - The school is an item of critical importance to the health of the community. Its viability, keeping the high school open, involving the community, the value of a smaller school, the feasibility of separating ourselves from the County of Barrhead, possibilities in specialized or adult education areas.

LIBRARY HOURS - It might be possible to organize a volunteer staff to keep the library open at noon or in the evenings.

POPULATION ENHANCEMENT - Setting goals for where we would like to see development of acreages, residences, etc. and targeting specific groups of people to encourage them to make this community their home. Setting targets for "ideal" populations to maximize viability and still retain our identity.

INDUSTRIAL OPPORTUNITIES - Cottage industries, value added manufacturing, tourist related industries, processing, community investment corporation, etc.

FACILITATORS

The importance of having good facilitators for all meetings was discussed. They will need to be prepared to move the discussion in the direction required, able to stimulate others to become involved, keep the focus off their own opinions, and, in general, keep things rolling.

NEXT MEETING

The date for the next meeting was set tentatively for Friday, February 12th at 7:30. Place to be announced.

NOTES

CARAGANA REPORT RESPONSE

The following people returned the questionnaire on the back of the report. A summary of their comments is included.

__________ (phone #)
Wheelchair ramps - Post Office
- Drop-in Centre
- Strawsons
Hiking/Cross-country Ski Trails
View from airstrip: painters, photographers
"Welcome Wagon: newcomers, tourist

__________ (phone #)
Health clinic
Teen drop-in centre
Improved recreational facilities
Better library hours
Business opportunities
Future of U of A property
Willing to help in community development

__________ (phone #)
Cross-country ski/hiking trails
- willing to help develop

__________ (phone #)
Retirement village
Vocational school
Cafeteria in school

__________ (phone #)
Objects to funding the building of skating rink at a time of economic depression.

__________ (phone #)
Comments extensively on the loss of this area's tax base in 1976. Would like to see residents organize themselves to seek redress for this event from the provincial government. Expresses a vision of this area as a viable, thriving, and independent community.